

THEODORE PARKER FERRIS
THE MAN, HIS METHOD AND MESSAGE

by
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To my Aunt Elizabeth Sweetnam
 who introduced me to Theodore Parker Ferris
 and the preaching of the
 catholic, liberal-evangelical tradition.

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ABSTRACT

What makes a great preacher? That is the question. In the case of every outstanding preacher there are certain mysterious factors which no one can define. There is also a craftsmanship which can be described and demonstrated.

Someone may ask: of what value to anyone in preaching are the techniques and strategy of another? One answer is to cite the fact that musicians analyze the structure of harmony; sculptors study anatomy; speakers learn the basic principles of style and form.

It is the thesis of this project that to learn and use the tested rhetorical and homiletical devices developed by past and present authorities is to produce better sermons. Theodore Parker Ferris, rector for thirty years of Trinity Church, Boston, has been chosen as a model.

This study looks at the man, his strengths and weaknesses; and at the formative factors which made him the kind of person he was. It also looks at the people who influenced his life; and at the personal qualities which made his preaching both unique and great.

Roman rhetoric is used as the canons of criticism for examining his method, and Ferris' four-fold classification of sermons as the measure of his message. Particular emphasis is placed on the ethical, theological, Christological and soteriological dimensions of his preaching.

All the books Dr. Ferris wrote were read and analyzed. Unfortunately, no autobiographical or biographical material has been published. Full access, however, was granted to Dr. Ferris' personal files which are housed in Trinity Church, Boston. All his correspondence, diaries, notebooks, lecture notes, sermon outlines, and transcribed sermons were read as part of the research.

Personal interviews were conducted with Dr. Ferris' associates: the Rev. Dr. Gardner Shattuck, and the Rev. Thomas Kennedy; and with all the members of the staff including the secretaries and maintenance men. Members of the congregation added their impressions of the man and his ministry. Of particular value was an interview with the Rev. John Bell, rector of the Church of the Incarnation in New York City. He had been a personal friend of Dr. Ferris since their days together at General Theological Seminary.

Many confidences were shared which portrayed Theodore Parker Ferris as an extremely complicated person. This revelation was both disturbing and reassuring. Disturbing, in the sense that his many faults and failings were evidences of his finite humanity; reassuring, because by God's grace, he was able to rise above his weaknesses, and become a source of strength to others.

Of interest to homileticians is Ferris' emphasis on the Spoken Word. Rhetoric, as an integral part of preaching, seems to have been neglected during the past few years. Writing for the eye has superceded the importance of writing

for the ear. Sermons, as a consequence, have lost some of their vitality; their power to persuade; their emotional energy; their ability to bring the listener to the point of making a decision.

Ferris' art of speaking with the careful phrasing of a manuscript and the informal delivery of speech, can serve as a model for combining the best of rhetoric and homiletics. It can act as an antidote to an over preoccupation with the art of writing for the eye. As a result, preaching could take on a deeper dimension, a more conversational tone. It could create the impression that the preacher is talking to an audience of one, rather than exhorting a congregation of thousands.

The secret, as this study reveals, is found in Ferris' experience as a tutor. He had learned to get something across to one person at a time. He had to see it himself in order to make the other person see it. He had to understand it so that he could put it in his own words. The result was that he spoke with a luminous simplicity. What is more, he had the gift of making each individual in the pew think that he was speaking to him or her.

Those who are tempted to think that the preaching art has fallen into disrepute should take a look at Theodore Parker Ferris. They would see what a power the pulpit through grace can be!

PROLOGUE

THEODORE PARKER FERRIS

Born in Port Chester, New York, on December 23, 1908, he was the only child of the local District Attorney and his wife, Eva Parker Ferris. He received his undergraduate degree from Harvard, and his divinity degree from General Theological Seminary in New York City. Both Harvard and General recognized him by conferring upon him honorary degrees; as did Rollins College, Florida; Middlebury College, Vermont; Westminster Choir College, Princeton; and Methodist-related Boston University.

He wrote the exposition of the Acts of the Apostles in The Interpreter's Bible, and was well known as a contributor to a variety of religious journals. An accomplished pianist, he wrote music for the Episcopal Hymnal. He was guest preacher on the National Radio Pulpit, the Episcopal Hour, the TV Man to Man Program and the Protestant Hour. Life magazine rated him as "one of America's finest,"¹ and Time included him in its "chancelful of most admired preachers."² He was a delegate to the 1st Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, Holland; and delegate to five Episcopal Conventions.

¹"Great Preachers," Life, April 6, 1953, pp. 126-33.

²"Changing Sermon," Time, March 16, 1962, p. 70.

Not only in church life, but also in the community at large, Dr. Ferris was an honored citizen. He served a term as a member of the Corporation of M. I. T. He was a trustee of Wellesley College, St. Mark's Boy's School and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He lectured in homiletics at the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Cambridge; was invited to consider the position of preacher at Harvard University; and turned down the professorship of homiletics at more than one well known theological seminary.



Chapter 1

THEODORE PARKER FERRIS - THE MAN

Theodore Parker Ferris, one of America's most distinguished preachers, occupied the historic pulpit of Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church in Boston from 1942 to his death in 1972. Previously he was rector of Emmanuel Church in Baltimore, and assistant at Grace Church, New York, under Walter Russell Bowie.

Few preachers I have heard could touch him, perhaps Paul Scherer, Gerald Kennedy, Wallace Hamilton, Leonard Griffith, David Read and Bryant Kirkland. The gift is rare. Ferris had it in abundance - the gift, the magic, the charisma.

The word charisma first appeared in western literature in the sixth book of the Odyssey. To help shipwrecked and begrimed Odysseus to win the favor of the people on whose shore he had been cast, Pallas Athena, daughter of Zeus, laid on him a great favor, a bright shimmering quality that made him, in spite of his bedraggled appearance, powerfully attractive, mysteriously alluring.³

Well, Theodore Parker Ferris, from Pallas Athena, God or someone had this gift laid on him. He stood tall but

³Homer, *Odyssey* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), vi. 1. 229-37.

homely, with a long pale face, small eyes and thick glasses. He was blind in one eye, deaf in one ear, and plagued with nervous and digestive disorders. He was formal to a fault, and showed that slight effeminacy and fastidiousness that sometimes overtake long-term bachelors. His voice was clear but not extraordinary. He was not a dramatic preacher in either the best or the worst sense, but he had the charisma.

One of his parishioners wrote:

like all men of genius, he was a hard man to describe. He was a man of many contradictions . . . He was an aristocrat with the interests, concerns and dedication - even the courtly manners of an earlier society. So it was somewhat paradoxical that he should be able to speak to our most current complexities.⁴

If one word above all could describe his nature it would be the word sensitive. He was sensitive to God and to human beings, and to all the personal experience of glory and tragedy in God's created universe. When things went wrong in the world or in a person's life he would say 'why?' 'Where have I failed?' 'What can I do to help?' And so often the answer came through his superb talents of preaching, teaching and prayer.

He was impatient with carelessness, not with careless people, but with their failure to know when "to care and not to care." He could not understand those who were careless

⁴Based on personal correspondence between Mrs. Rolf P. Lynton and Ruth Cheyne, December 5, 1972.

⁵Theodore Parker Ferris, "To Care And Not To Care", (transcribed sermon, May 5, 1963.)

with their responsibilities in church or state; those who denied the beauty of fine art or those who misused or abused immortal music. But his impatience always gave way to an overpowering sensitivity to God's love and saving grace for everyone.

Week in and week out, year after year, he spoke with the insight of a poet, and the foresight of a prophet. Never once did he rephrase a sermon. For thirty years he kept the freshness of his approach, the clarity and depth of his thought, and the vitality of his many illustrations.

He struggled and suffered in his preparation. At times his sermons came quickly like a bolt out of the blue. At other times the process was slow. One Saturday night, he phoned the Rev. John Bell, rector of the Church of the Incarnation in New York City, to complain that the sermon wouldn't jell. On Sunday night he phoned again to report that it had jelled in the morning, as he walked from the Clarendon Street Rectory to the Church.⁶

But one way or the other, he always knew the depths of personal doubt and anguish in the lives of the people he would face when he entered the pulpit on Sunday. The intellectual and inspirational qualities of his sermons brought comfort and courage to thousands of others across the nation and around the world when they read them the following week.

⁶Statement by the Rev. John Bell, rector of the Church of the Incarnation, New York City, personal interview, Boston, Massachusetts, June 14, 1975.

He was sensitive to them also, and to their cries for help.

Strangely enough, he never planned to preach. He thought he would teach, and he did so for four years as a tutor and instructor in his own seminary. During those years he realized that he was not a scholar in the professional sense, and that people made a greater claim on him than books. Consequently, he decided to see how the Christian religion worked in a more relaxed atmosphere than the cloistered community of a theological college.

He never had any instruction in voice or diction. He had never done any public speaking. He had taken one course in preaching given by the rector of Grace Church, and during the years that he served as tutor and fellow he worked one day a week plus Sundays in Grace Church, New York. After a while the rector asked him to preach at the evening service, and then again, and again. He did it in much the same way as he taught the young men who came to him for tutorial work. And he found himself doing it more and more, and when people came to him and asked him to give lectures at clergy conferences, he said: "'What about?' 'Preaching,' they said. 'Preaching is not my field, (he replied,) my field is the philosophy of religion - theology, not preaching.'"⁷

That is how it all began, and he could never quite take in why or how preaching came to be the first thing that

⁷Theodore Parker Ferris, "Nearer Than Hands And Feet" (transcribed sermon, June 22, 1958.)

people thought about when they thought of him. Sharing this with a theological student he wrote: "it makes it clear that we never really see ourselves as others see us, and that in the long run there is a hand that shapes our destiny in ways that we can hinder or help but never change."⁸

The first intimation of that 'hand' came not in church, but at home; and not on his knees by his bed, saying his prayers, but in bed, listening to his mother reading Bible stories. He remembered one especially, the story about Elisha and the Shunamite woman. He liked the sound of Shunamite. He didn't know what it meant, but the Shunamite woman was a real person to him, nevertheless. As he heard it, he didn't ask any questions. It never dawned on him to ask whether or not it really happened. He just listened.

The stories that his mother read came to her because she had once been a Methodist Sunday School teacher, before she became an Episcopalian. So it was that his first experience of God came through the Methodist Church. Behind that was the Christian community, and behind that the whole Biblical tradition. Reflecting on it he observed: "I don't know specifically what it did to me. I don't remember how I felt, except that I enjoyed the stories."⁹

Later on he went to church and did the things that

⁸Based on personal correspondence between Theodore Parker Ferris and Ronald C. Smith. May 25, 1972.

⁹Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Institutional Element In Religion" (transcribed sermon, November 29, 1970.)

boys in community churches usually do. He sang in the choir, and was a crucifer and an acolyte. His parents were not particularly religious, and they didn't always go to church, and he didn't always go, but most of the time they did. How much he took in he didn't know:

but I know that I bowed my head as I passed the cross and at the name of the Lord Jesus. I knelt on my knees when I said my prayers, and if I spoke at all in the church, except in the service, I spoke in a whisper. In other words, I worshipped the Lord there.¹⁰

He grew up in a small, friendly world. His parents loved him, but even as a child, he had the sense to know that his parents' love was not entirely lacking the friction which exists when two people live under one roof. They were wise, but not sophisticated; good but not pious. The result was that at home things were fairly safe and happy, things made sense, and were friendly.

Everything outside his home, however, was not always friendly. His contemporaries were not always friendly. He had no facility whatever with any kind of a ball - baseball, handball, tennis ball, golf ball, football, any kind of a ball. He couldn't throw one, catch one, or hit one. That made him something of an oddity; and small children can be cruel to those who are different from themselves.

'T.P.' as they nicknamed him, felt the sting of that cruelty. Someone who knew him, said that he would stand in his bedroom with his nose pressed against the window-pane,

¹⁰Ibid.

staring wistfully out at the world of his peers.¹¹ Years later, in what appeared to be merely a hypothetical illustration, he pleaded for some sensitivity for those who were different or peculiar:

Perhaps a schoolboy, a sensitive boy, who doesn't quite fit the pattern, and who is made fun of all through his school years, may be damaged in such a way as to make his whole life different from what it otherwise would be, a shut-in because he was left-out.¹²

So he had a taste of that!

His father because of his vocation as a lawyer, was completely surrounded by problems. The boy heard of the heartaches of many people and lived through many a crisis in the local community; and he learned from the discussions and conversations at the dinner table that not everyone was to be trusted - even in the church. He attended Public School, took piano lessons, and graduated from High School. One thing followed another quite naturally. He didn't stop to think what the meaning of life was, or what the purpose was. He simply did each thing as it came and tried to make the best decision that he could.

When he went to Harvard, he really didn't know where he was. He had come from a Public High School, and because he didn't know how to find his way, he was routed into the

¹¹Statement by the Rev. Thomas Kennedy, assistant at Trinity, personal interview, Boston, Massachusetts, June 10, 1975.

¹²Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Challenge Of The Resurrection" (transcribed sermon, April 12, 1959.)

English Department. There he found himself in classes in which he had no interest whatever. By the time the November exams rolled around, he thought he was about to lose his place in the college because of his failure to do what was required.

His roommate was not in the English Department and therefore was allowed to take a survey of the whole field of English literature, given by Bliss Perry. His roommate knew how disturbed he was and one day he said, "Why don't you come to Bliss Perry's lecture?"¹³ He went. That was his response. Bliss Perry did the rest.

Looking back on it, he wrote: "One after another the gates of the Kingdom began to open. Something happened to which I responded, but which I did not initiate or cause."¹⁴ It was the beginning of a life-long interest in English literature.

About the same time his interest in the ministry developed. In spite of the fact that in those years religious stock was considerably below par, and the Church's influence and prestige was at one of its lowest ebbs, he began to feel in some strange, rather vague way, that he wanted to spend his life in its service. He began to look for a church 'home'. He had been brought up in the

¹³Theodore Parker Ferris, "What The Church Gives You" (transcribed sermon, November 18, 1962.)

¹⁴Ibid.

old-fashioned high church, so he tried the 'Advent' and 'Trinity' and then settled down at the First Congregational Church in Cambridge.

Dr. Raymond Calkins was the preacher, and he undoubtedly made a deep impression on Theodore Parker Ferris. Notations from his diary of those years read as follows:

January 10, 1926 - went to Community Congregational Church - very good sermon.¹⁵

January 31, 1926 - met Dr. Calkins - wonderful preacher.¹⁶

February 21, 1926 - wonderful sermon as usual.¹⁷

April 10, 1927 - Dr. Calkin's sermon the best I have ever heard.¹⁸

When he went to General Theological Seminary he wrote to Dr. Calkins and told him that he had been instrumental in his decision to become a minister. Dr. Calkins responded: "Can you realize how much it meant to me to know that it was with me that the awakening came to you that the Christian ministry must be your calling . . . You are my joy and crown!"¹⁹

Perhaps nobody could have had a brighter future. Everything seemed to be opening before him, but there were to be heartaches and interruptions along the way. In the

¹⁵Theodore Parker Ferris, Personal Diary, 1926.

¹⁶Ibid. ¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Theodore Parker Ferris, Personal Diary, 1927.

¹⁹Based on personal correspondence between Dr. Calkins and Theodore Parker Ferris, January 6, 1930.

long summer vacation after his first year in the graduate school, he saw his doctor and the doctor advised him to go into the hospital for what he thought was minor surgery. He was accustomed to accept the advice of his doctor, so he went. The minor surgery was followed by complications and the complications were followed by major surgery. He barely survived. Things went from bad to worse.

Finally, when he and his family were in a state of depression and his future looked to him just about as bleak as anybody's future could be, another doctor was called in and asked for an opinion. After a careful examination, he said that he would operate the next morning.

Ferris' spirit sank below sea level. He felt he didn't have the strength to take it again. He made no reply. Then the doctor looked at him and said: "You will be a new man in four weeks."²⁰ Ferris believed him, even though everything in the picture was evidence to the contrary. All the chances were against his getting well, all the predictions of the doctors, he found out afterwards, were against it. Yet he believed the doctor and went into the operation with complete confidence in the future.

Years later he wrote:

That is when I had my first inkling as to what faith really was. I knew then, on this relatively small scale, that faith is confidence in the future based upon trust in a person. It was not difficult

²⁰Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Third Ingredient of a Rich Life" (transcribed sermon, December 14, 1958.)

to transpose that to a higher key and to know that Faith is confidence in the future based upon trust in the promises of God.²¹

In spite of the success of the operation, he had lost one whole year in theological school, and he secretly, though not bitterly resented it. This detour, this delay in his training and preparation seemed unreasonable. It was a long time before he came to see that it had led him to a knowledge of suffering and sickness that he could never have had otherwise. He could never have ministered to people who were going through that sort of experience unless he had suffered himself.

In a similar way, Harry Emerson Fosdick, who was one of his heroes, said that he would never have really known what prayer meant, and therefore would never have been able to write his book on The Meaning of Prayer, if he had not had a major nervous breakdown in the early part of his ministry.²²

So it was, that shortly after Ferris recovered from his operation, and was looking forward to returning to Seminary in the autumn, he began to write his thoughts in the first of his many note books. He had been struggling and grasping his way through the complexities of religious belief and grappling with the skepticism that haunted him.

²¹Ibid.

²²Harry Emerson Fosdick. The Living of These Days (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 75.

He finally gathered himself together and wrote this:

Who made me? Who set these bones, and drew this flesh so carefully, and shot this blood so surely? Who drives the muscles, works the brain and times the pulse? This voice, where does it come from? This sight, who makes it see? This hearing, who makes it hear? Not I. I stand in wonder. God planned me and made me. God thought, and lo, I am.²³

These questions and their answer provided the material for his first sermon. It was entitled "Gather Up The Fragments", and its thesis was that there is a God that gathers up the fragments of time until time shall be no more. This God is a reality that cannot be proved by logical argument. God is something that one runs into and until one has had some encounter, nothing anyone says will mean very much one way or the other.

Examples to substantiate this thesis were drawn from other entries in his notebook:

I can know all there is to know about the sun. I can read all that the experts have written, beginning with Galileo and Copernicus right down to the present, but if I have never felt the warmth of the sun, never have been dazzled by the mystery of it, what I know about the sun will not mean very much one way or the other.²⁴

I can know all there is to know about God, all that the Christian theologians have written, all that the mystics have put down on paper, but if I have never stood under a sky at night and felt the presence of God, not in the stars, but rather in the energy of mind and spirit that transcends the stars and holds them in their courses, before whom I bow in awe, from whom my little life is derived and to whom I ultimately return; if I have never felt that, what I know about God from books

²³Theodore Parker Ferris, Notebook, 1931.

²⁴Ibid.

or other people's reports will not mean very much!²⁵

I can know all there is to know about the doctrine of the Trinity, I can read all the learned theologians, the classical ones, the ones in the middle ages, and the modern interpreters of the doctrine, but if I have never felt the love of God, or the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, never felt that those three are somehow, all one and the same reality, what I know about the doctrine of the Trinity will not mean very much to me.²⁶

Then comes the application:

That is why the church tries so hard in its services of worship to appeal not only to our minds (God knows they are God-given and we cannot reject them) but so to conduct its services that we will feel the everlasting arms are underneath us; that we will feel in our bones that all things work together for good to them that love God; that we will feel in the face of Jesus Christ, the glory of God is radiating its life and energy.²⁷

And then the conclusion:

We after all, are creatures who can both think and feel. If we feel without thinking, we will run aground on the shores of sentimentalism. On the other hand, if we think without feeling, we will freeze to death. And that is why the religion of some people, today, is so sterile and so dead.²⁸

The style and the metre was unmistakably reminiscent of Paul's letter to the Corinthians; the experience and the expression were undoubtedly Theodore Parker Ferris. The grade awarded was an A, and it was the beginning of a life-long friendship between Ferris and his homiletics professor. "That sermon," wrote Walter Russell Bowie: "was my first recognition that you were one who would have a message for the whole church beyond any other man that I then knew."²⁹

²⁵Ibid. ²⁶Ibid. ²⁷Ibid. ²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Letter from Walter Russell Bowie to Theodore Parker Ferris, November 7, 1966.

When Ferris wrote his book, Go Tell the People, he dedicated it to Walter Russell Bowie - "the one who taught me all I know about preaching."³⁰ Bowie in turn, responded:

Nobody taught you, or needed to teach you, what you know about preaching. God gave you a great gift which would have unfolded under any conditions . . . as it has unfolded, to be one of the most significant enrichments of our church in this generation.³¹

In a sermon entitled "The Imitation of Christ", Ferris further acknowledged his debt to Bowie:

When I began to preach, who did I imitate? I imitated the finest preacher I know, Dr. Walter Russell Bowie, the rector of Grace Church, New York. I was working with him: I heard him preach every Sunday morning. My friends told me that I imitated his gestures and the inflection of his voice. These of course, were left aside as I grew older, but the initial impact of that imitation has never left me.³²

Other major influences in his life at the time were Dr. Easton, who aroused his interest in the New Testament and who lectured about it in such a way as to increase the mystery of Christ in his eyes. There was his tutor, Charles Fielding, who represented teaching at its best, and who helped him work out for himself what the documents of the New Testament had to say, and stimulated an interest which continued to grow through the years. There was Dr. Stewart, who had no prefabricated answers to theological

³⁰Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), dedication page.

³¹Letter from Walter Russell Bowie to Theodore Parker Ferris, April 12, 1951.

³²Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Imitation of Christ" (transcribed sermon, January 9, 1966.)

mysteries, but taught him to say 'on the one hand . . . but on the other,' 'not only this . . . but also that.' In teaching Dogmatic Theology he saved Ferris from being dogmatic.

Dr. Batten led him into the Old Testament by the way marked J.E.D.P. Dr. Guron took him over the ranges of history and lifted him out of his narrow habitat: "what he said in his lectures was acted out in his own life, which was so ecumenical in its scope as to make the ecumenical movement of the present day seem almost too small."³³

Dr. Hodgson made him think, helped him to find the reason for the faith that was in him. "He himself was the best apologetic for the Christian faith."³⁴

Towering above them all was the Dean, Dr. Fosbroke. He opened great doors for him as he did for hundreds of students. For one thing he opened the Old Testament in a way that was unforgettable. But he went much further and did things infinitely greater than that. He was interested in all of life and introduced his students to a religion which included all of life.

Addressing the Seminary Alumni on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his graduation, Ferris said of him:

I can still hear his voice when I read his favorite

³³Theodore Parker Ferris, "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Speech to the 1933 Graduating Class of General Theological Seminary."

³⁴Ibid.

collects: I still recognize the faint traces at least of his influence on everything I think and say and do. The roots of his being were in the life and energy of the God who revealed himself to wandering Semitic tribes in the power of a volcanic eruption or an earth-shaking storm. He was the God of history and events. The dynamic pulse that gave life to everything, to every shred of existence. It is no wonder that long before the secular city, the Dean had torn down the veil between the sacred and the secular.³⁵

When Ferris graduated from Seminary in 1933, Liberal Protestantism was at the peak of its influence. The Neo-Orthodox were just beginning to be heard in the land. Reinhold Niebuhr went to Union Seminary in 1925, and by 1933 his influence was beginning to be felt among the rank and file. Fundamentalism, the liberals thought, had been settled once and for all, and the debate with modernism finished. How wrong they were! The waves of Biblical literalism began to rise again, and liberalism had to be revived in order to defend the integrity of reason and intelligence in the things of religion. 1933 was the year the banks closed. It was the year Franklin Roosevelt took office. It was the year Hitler appeared on the horizon. Following that there was another world war more terrible than anyone had conceived possible.

When he graduated, like most graduates, he knew more about Christianity and the Church than he would ever know again. Without being boastful, most graduates can lead any congregation, manage any church, and answer most questions

³⁵Ibid.

of the world. In due time, however, one learns that there are no such certainties as that in the life of a mature person. One loses some of the assurance of youth; one is not quite so sure of many things as one once was. In such a mood, Ferris, wrote the following in the Harvard University Report:

People often ask ministers what makes them go into the ministry in the first place. It is not an easy question to answer, in fact, in my own case, I often wonder if I knew at the time exactly why I wanted to do it. I had been born and brought up in the church and just somehow came to feel that I wanted to be a minister.

I have no family, no career as careers are usually thought of, no money except what I earn, the salary that pays my living, but I have hundreds of human relationships with people of every walk of life, of every age, and every sort of temperament and disposition.

My life up to this point has been to try and make the religious interpretation of life as plain as I can in sermons, books, addresses, lectures and classes, and to win people to an acceptance of it. I hope that I shall have the wits and strength to continue in the same for some time to come.³⁶

He did, until he was struck down with cancer in 1972. It was a terrible blow both to him and his congregation. He wrote them in all honesty and openness about the nature of his illness:

I am on the boundary between the old world and the new, between the theology of the past and the existential thinking of the present, between time and eternity . . . I am not well, and I'm not sick, I'm somewhere in between, finding new pleasures to take the place of old ones, realizing for the first time what my ministry has meant to people in all parts of the world. It is a

³⁶Theodore Parker Ferris, Harvard University Report, (1954).

sobering reflection.³⁷

Then he challenged the congregation to:

Stand by the church; and treat me as far as possible as a normal human being and not as an invalid. I know as you should know, that there is no guarantee of a cure either by therapy, or by prayer, or by faith. But I am full of ideas for the future and have great hopes.³⁸

As the months progressed the congregation came to see his faith not only strengthened within himself, but within themselves, as both he and they came face to face with terminal cancer. For years he had an "almost psychotic conviction that he would perish from the ravages of cancer", and he did. He died in the rectory on November 26, 1972. He had also an "overriding fear of the lonesomeness and lostness of retirement - he could not conceive of being other than the rector of Trinity Church."³⁹ He never had to face it.

His funeral was held on Wednesday, November 29, at twelve noon. It was a triumphant service filled with the people and the music he loved. The choir sang his favorite Brahms and Bach. The staff sat in the pews normally reserved for the family. They came in a body: clergy, secretaries, maintenance men and women. They were black, white, young

³⁷Letter from Theodore Parker Ferris to Trinity Church Congregation, August 25, 1972.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Based on personal correspondence between Dr. Marshall Bartlett and Ruth Cheyne. December 12, 1972.

and old. Some of them had worked for Dr. Ferris for thirty years or more. With them came another group - the clergy who had been associated with him in the past as his assistants. They loved him, and they wanted to be there. On the other side of the aisle were the Wardens, Vestry, and their wives. This was his family!

On November 30, he was returned to his birthplace in Port Chester, New York. He was returned there because that is where he had his roots, his beginning. That is where he wanted to go. He had expressed the desire to go "home" after reading from T. S. Eliot's The Four Quartets, "In my end is my beginning."⁴⁰

⁴⁰T. S. Eliot. The Four Quartets
(New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1943), p. 39.

Chapter 2

THEODORE PARKER FERRIS - HIS METHOD

Attempts to analyze the man and to find out why he was the way he was, are probably doomed to failure. However, it seems fair to say that: the gifts of a man may be the sparks struck off by the friction created by his own inner conflicts. To be sure, Ferris worried more about his health than any other particular thing. He lived with an almost daily dread of cancer; and like Donald Baillie, was subject to frequent mental depression.

On one occasion, aboard ship in a storm, he found that he couldn't sleep. The tension was unbearable. In his notebook he made the following entry: "It may be just as well to go through this, but if it continues, I will not. However, before though not so severe, bad periods always followed by brighter ones. So!"¹

The next entry is a sermon outline, obviously related to the previous emotional disturbance. It is titled "The Disturbed Church".

A disturbed person upset and upsetting, not sure of himself, not responding normally to the situations that come his way, not quite sure where he is going or how, what life's all about, his view of life is blurred, distorted, and sometimes completely out of focus - in

¹Theodore Parker Ferris, Notebook, 1946, written aboard the liner United States on the way to London and Paris.

some sense the church today is a disturbed church.

1. Nature of Disturbance
2. Cause of Disturbance
3. Treatment of Disturbance²

On another occasion, while travelling by plane, he expressed his fear of air travel by writing the following prayer on the back of an airline's wine list:

Lord Jesus, I would like to be able to do myself the things I help others to do. I can give them a confidence I myself do not have, and I can quiet their anxieties but not my own. What do I lack, or is it the way I am made? I want to be free to move from place to place without fear, and I want to face the thing to be done not without tension, but without panic. You did it and you made it possible for others to do it. You didn't count on drugs, you trusted your Father. You didn't turn away from life, nor did you seek pain or death. You met each as it came. I would like to do the same but by myself I can't. I like to think that you can be with me and in me and with your help I can do better. This is what I hope and ask for.³

Ferris was the kind of person who was able to use his black moments to reach down into himself and find an extremity of meaning and experience which he could then communicate to others. As a result, he spent many hours in counselling sessions, parish calls, private celebrations of Holy Communion and in a wide and varied correspondence.

He ministered to the rich and the poor, the responsible and irresponsible, the highly cultivated and virtually illiterate, the liberal and conservative, high and low

²Ibid.

³Theodore Parker Ferris, American Airline's wine list, Summer of 1968.

church, well and sick, good and bad. He spent more hours in the hospital than he did in the church:

The hospitals continue to be my greatest love, and it is there that I often know a person whom I have seen for thirty years - I spend more and more time in my study seeing people.⁴

People came to talk with him about their problems; some of them were parishioners; some of them he had never laid eyes on before they appeared at his door. Always he asked how they happened to come to him. The answer was almost always the same. They had heard him preach, and thought he would be willing to listen. Commenting on this, he wrote:

I spend less time on sermons than on almost any other part of my ministry. I spend more time with people than I do with preaching, and there are times when the preaching ministry opens the way of the pastoral ministry and the pastoral ministry feeds the preaching ministry and saves it from becoming a cold academic exercise.⁵

It embarrassed him that people labelled him as a preacher. He always wished he might be more worthy of the label. Unlike some preachers he had no daily discipline. He did the things he had to do when they had to be done. The previous Sunday sermon was edited on Tuesday morning so that it could go to the printer that afternoon. The tape for the Sunday broadcast was made on Thursday afternoon so that it could go to the radio station on Friday. And the

⁴Theodore Parker Ferris, Personal Diary, May 29, 1966.

⁵Episcopalian, (February, 1967), p. 21.

Sunday sermon was prepared on Saturday morning when no other engagements were ever made.

He spent as much time planning and preparing the service of worship as he did the sermon. He never tried to read a lesson from the Bible until it made sense to him. He never tried to read a prayer until he had prayed it himself. "People," he said, "who come to church":

want to know what it's all about, what the Christian view of life is; and how it can be defended against the materialists, the existentialists, the hedonists, and the rationalists. They are not looking for eloquent oratory; they are looking for simple direct clear thinking expressed in words they can understand with a conviction they can catch.⁶

As a tutor, he had learned how to get something across to one person at a time. He had to see it himself, or he could never make the other person see it. He had to know what it meant, what it was trying to say. He had to understand it well enough to put it in his own words; and he had to know the student well enough to know whether he was getting it. That is why people listened to him when he preached. He had cultivated a habit.

The result was that he always spoke with a genius of simplicity; the kind that makes people say, "Why anyone could have said that."

He spoke to persons and out of their deep concerns. And so the weekly miracle, his hearers almost gasping, "Why

⁶Theodore Parker Ferris, Lectures on Preaching, unpublished notes.

he's speaking to me!"

He spoke as a relaxed and forgiven man. He took himself and other people where they were, not where he or they thought they ought to be. The result was disarming, confirming.

His language was revelational. He understood with the philosophers before him, that truth is revealed by choosing the right word. Ferris could do that, choose the right word. If he dealt with the concept of power then he illuminated a volcano, live, erupting. If he spoke of God's glory he described Boston Commons in Spring, and told of the sun hitting the golden dome of the Statehouse at high noon.

One Sunday, he preached on the problem of evil. He pictured a rosebush he had planted and how he had later found it uprooted and torn apart, the senseless work of a hoodlum. He expressed his dismay; and later on his need and commitment to plant in the same place another rosebush. That sermon, that rosebush, remain within one.

To ask the secret of such memorable preaching is to ask an unanswerable question. If the answer were known our Schools of Theology would be turning out preachers on an assembly line. But we must not indulge in mystery mongering. Someone has said that preachers are born not made. To be sure, a great preacher like Ferris is a gift to the world. His genius can neither be copied nor cultivated. Nevertheless, we believe that those without the gift of genius can become good preachers by training and effort. That is why

we have chosen to examine Ferris' rhetorical and homiletical theory in an attempt to analyze his craftsmanship.

To him, a sermon was not a lecture, a commentator's column, an editorial, or an essay. It was a "revelation of some aspect of the reality of God in reference to some human need or condition."⁷ This concept of preaching made of it something more than simple rhetoric. In his theory, homiletics is a super-structure built upon the foundation of rhetoric.

In his book Go Tell the People, it is apparent that he did not use the terminology of the rhetoricians, nor that of the communication theorists. The absence of these elements however, did not mean that he was ignorant of them. While he did not rely as heavily upon the works of the masters as some of the early homileticians (Campbell, Blair, Whatley) he showed a broad knowledge of rhetorical theory, and set forth these principles as the foundation for his homiletics. What we shall discover is that his theory included all the constituents: invention, arrangement, style, and delivery.

INVENTION

From the rhetoricians point of view "invention" is the first constituent of speechmaking. It has a dual nature

⁷Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 17.

consisting of the materials from which the speech is made, and the imprint that is imposed upon the materials by a given speaker.

Broadus speaks of invention as consisting of two steps:

1. Getting a combination of factual stimuli.
2. Responding to the combination.

He illustrates it by the process of making meal (bread): First, there must be the grain (factual stimuli or raw materials) and then there must be the grinding (speaker's response to the raw materials).⁸

The body of factual stimuli or raw materials is also described as being the "non-artistic" elements of invention, and the response the speaker makes to the raw materials the "artistic" elements.

Non-Artistic Materials of Development

Among theologians there are two types of knowledge: revealed and natural. Revealed knowledge consists of that which is beyond one's power of research and reasoning, whereas natural knowledge consists of that which one can discover. Ferris employs both types of knowledge.

Revealed Knowledge. In the Bible we find what the theologian speaks of as "revealed knowledge." "The Bible is the source

⁸John A. Broadus, On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons (New York: Harper and Row, new ed., 1944), pp. 76-7.

Book"⁹ says Ferris, "and for this reason: in the Bible, God speaks to us."¹⁰

When we use the Bible to collect materials of development, we have the dignity of proclaiming the word that is beyond change and death. "Our purpose," he declares, "is to find in the Bible the light, the strength and the grace . . . to meet and cope with the problems of existence."¹¹

Ferris was an expository preacher, a skilled craftsman at exegesis, and a great teller of Biblical stories. To him myths and parables because they are primitive, because they are universal, could slip past the defenses of the intellect and talk to the unconscious levels within. The Parable of the Prodigal Son, as we shall see from the following examples, could go places where nothing else could go:

We now face a dark future. What part can we play in discerning what the future shall be? It would be folly to ignore the forces over which we have no control, and it would be fatal to overlook the forces which can be directed by our own will. Our destiny has often been described as an irresistible wave or an uncontrollable weather, but if our destiny is like the weather it is the weather plus the will of the weather-beaten man. Our future, therefore will largely depend upon what we do when we are sent out to feed the pigs. The prodigal rose above the weakening influences of his life and said, "I will." It is time for us to do the same.¹²

⁹Ferris, op. cit. p. 102.

¹⁰Theodore Parker Ferris, "Learning to Read the Bible" (transcribed sermon, March 21, 1971.)

¹¹Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 63.

¹²Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Prodigal Son" (transcribed sermon, February 7, 1943.)

And again:

What a sad time some of our men are going to have when they come back from the far country, from Japan and France and Germany, where the lid has been off and the restrictions have been cast aside and they have been able to let loose! What a day of reckoning it will be when they find the same obligations and the same responsibilities hold whether a man be in Paris or in Hoboken, New Jersey! What a sad day of reckoning!¹³

And once more:

Some of us like the prodigal son break loose; we get an apartment in town, or we get out of town altogether, or we go to Europe, or to Cuba, or to South America, or wherever it is we want to go. It isn't the place, and it isn't the distance. That doesn't matter so long as we get away. In a novel written not too many years ago, the girl is described this way: "She had left her rich, stuffy mother and stepped out on her own. She had left the church. She had a job, a flat, a lover, and a fierce contempt for wealthy married people like her sister. She was so wrapped up in her independence that she would not admit the womanly advantage of being dependent." Some of us try that; in fact that's the standard pattern right now.¹⁴

So it was, that more than once, Ferris shook the Trinity congregation with his frank assessment of that story!

Natural Knowledge. Ferris includes material from almost every facet of life and knowledge. The preacher, he says "who observes life carefully and who, as he observes it, sees the meaning of it . . . will never lack materials."¹⁵

¹³Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Prodigal Son" (transcribed sermon, December 2, 1945.)

¹⁴Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Prodigal Son" (transcribed sermon, February 7, 1970.)

¹⁵Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 94.

One of the most striking features about his preaching is the diversity of his illustrative material. Boot-blacks, barbers, fathers and mothers, ordinary people, are talked about in sermons along with artists, poets, doctors, and ministers.

In a sermon which asks the question "How Can I Get a New Spirit?", he tells the congregation about the man who shines his shoes:

There are people who may not have the spirit in any religious terminology that we have been using, but nevertheless when you see it you recognize it as the same thing. I find it for example, in a man who shines shoes on Charles Street. He takes as much delight in giving a good shine as I take in preaching as good a sermon as I can, and I confess to you that sometimes on Saturday when my spirits are flagging and my well is dry, I go and get a shine, because that young man's spirit is communicated to me. I think to myself, if he can put as much of himself into shining shoes, how much more can I put myself into preparing a sermon.¹⁶

Books provide another source - especially "biography, essays, novels and poems."¹⁷ In his sermons we find reference to the following:

Biography:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Actors - | Edwin Booth, Marcello Mastroianni,
Sir Lawrence Olivier. |
| Artists - | Photographer Yousuf Karsh, Michelangelo,
Pablo Picasso, Raphael, Rembrandt,
Salisbury, John Sargent, Van Dyke,
Van Gogh, Grant Wood. |
| Clergy - | William Booth, Bishop Brent, |

¹⁶Theodore Parker Ferris, "How Can I Get a New Spirit?" (transcribed sermon, January 14, 1951.)

¹⁷Ferris, Go Tell the People, p. 94.

Phillips Brooks, Cardinal Cushing,
 Harry Emerson Fosdick, Bishop Hall,
 Bishop Hines, Pope John XXIII,
 Studdert Kennedy, Martin Luther King,
 Bishop Lawrence, George McLeod,
 Cardinal Mercier, Cardinal Newman,
 Bishop Pike, Robert Raines,
 Richard Roberts, Maude Royden,
 Saint Augustine, Savonarola,
 Bishop Scarlett, Bishop Sherrill,
 Archbishop Soderblom, Charles Spurgeon,
 William Temple, Leslie Weatherhead.

- Dancers - Ruth St. Denis, Agnes de Mille.
- Doctors - Tom Dooley, Wilfred Grenfell,
 Mayo Brothers, Walter Reed,
 Albert Schweitzer, Dr. Trudeau.
- Explorers - Christopher Columbus,
 Lawrence of Arabia,
 David Livingston, Captain Scott.
- Inventors - Alexander Graham Bell, Gutenberg,
 James Watt.
- Missionaries - Florence Allshorn, Stanley Jones,
 Mother Teresa.
- Musicians - Marian Anderson, Bach, The Beatles,
 Beethoven, Nadia Boulanger, Brahms,
 Benjamin Britten, Debussy,
 George Gershwin, Handel, Myra Hess,
 Horowitz, Mendelssohn,
 Elvis Presley, Schumann,
 Rudolph Serkin, Jean Sibelius,
 Sir Arthur Sullivan, Toscanini,
 Verdi, Wagner, Bruno Walter,
 Ralph Vaughan Williams.
- Nurses - Edith Cavell, Florence Nightingale.
- Philosophers - Socrates, Alfred North Whitehead.
- Poets - Elizabeth Barrett Browning,
 Robert Burns, T. S. Eliot,
 Alice Meynell, Edward Shelton,
 William Wordsworth.
- Scientists - Copernicus, Madame Curie,
 Sir Alexander Fleming, Galileo,
 William Harvey, Edward Jenner,
 Sir Joseph Lister, Louis Pasteur.

Sportsmen - Roy Campnella, Joe Namath, Babe Ruth.

Statesmen - Alexander, Bismark, Senator Brook,
Caesar, Madame Chiang kai-Shek,
Winston Churchill, De Gaulle,
John Diefenbaker, Queen Elizabeth II,
Benjamin Franklin, Frederick the Great,
Gandhi, George VI, Barry Goldwater,
Dag Hammarskjold, Hilter, Joan of Arc,
John Kennedy, Robert E. Lee,
Abraham Lincoln, Queen Mary,
George Marshall, Thomas More, Mussolini,
Napoleon, Franklin Roosevelt,
Adlai Stevenson, Harry Truman,
George Washington, Wilberforce,
Wendell Wilkie, Woodrow Wilson.

Essays:

Economists - Kenneth Galbraith, Karl Marx.

Historians - Butterfield, Commager, Toynbee.

Philosophers - Aristotle, Thomas Huxley, Plato,
Bertrand Russell, George Santayana,
Sartre, Thoreau, Alfred North Whitehead.

Preachers - Walter Russell Bowie,
Henry Sloane Coffin,
Harry Emerson Fosdick,
William Orchard, F. W. Robertson,
Dick Sheppard, Leslie Weatherhead.

Psychologists - Victor Frankl, Freud, William James,
Jung.

Scientists - Francis Bacon, Compton, Darwin,
Albert Einstein, Loren Eiseley,
Johannes Kepler, Pascal, Harlow Shapley.

Theologians - Thomas Aquinas, Altizer,
Donald and John Baillie, Bonhoeffer,
Bultmann, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,
Harvey Cox, Dibelius, William Hamilton,
Georgia Harkness, A. M. Hunter,
Dean Inge, Jeremias, Rufus Jones,
Joseph Klausner, John Knox, Ronald Knox,
Martin Luther, F. D. Maurice,
Micklem, Montefiore,
Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr,
Charles Raven, John Robinson,
Canon Streeter, William Temple,
Paul Tillich, Baron Von Hugel.

Novels:

Albert Camus, Cervantes, A. J. Cronin,
Julian Greene, Thomas Hardy, Hawthorne,
O. Henry, D. H. Lawrence, C. S. Lewis,
Robert Nathan, Marcel Proust,
C. P. Snow, Mark Twain, Peter de Vries,
H. G. Wells, Thornton Wilder.

Poems and Plays:

Matthew Arnold, W. H. Auden,
Donald Babcock, Beckett, Rupert Brooke,
Robert Browning, Robert Burns,
Willa Cather, Emily Dickinson,
T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost,
Christopher Fry, Goethe,
Robinson Jeffers, Keats, Sidney Lanier,
Vachel Lindsay, Longfellow, Amy Lowell,
Archibald MacLeish, Edward Markham,
Marlowe, John Masefield, John Marquand,
Milton, Eugene O'Neill, Wilfred Owen,
Michel Quoist, Arlington Robinson,
Christina Rossetti, St. Antoine Exupery,
Carl Sandburg, Siegfried Sassoon,
George Bernard Shaw, Shelley,
Edward Shelton, Francis Thompson,
Tennessee Williams, W. B. Yeats.

Other Sources:

Broadway plays; movies; magazines:
Atlantic, Esquire, Life, New Yorker,
Time; newspaper clippings and popular
songs.

Artistic Materials of Development

In rhetorical tradition these elements are known as "modes of expression". They originate primarily within the personality and ability of the speaker and they are usually thought of as three in number: (1) ethos - ethical or personal proof (2) logos - logical or reasoned proof (3) pathos - emotional proof.

Ethos. In classical theory it is held that high credibility in a speaker has a three fold source: sagacity, character, and good will. Ferris displays all three:

Sagacity: In each of his sermons he gives a brief yet comprehensive background of the text. He is aware of the fact that many people in the congregation have only a surface knowledge of Biblical history and would not be able to comprehend his message without the historical setting. Also, the setting helps to catch their attention and prepare them for the message built upon the text. This practice reveals thoughtful and intellectual workmanship.

Character: Effective preaching depends on the degree to which the preacher personifies what he is talking about. That Ferris achieved this credibility is evident from the following letter:

I appreciate greatly what you say, what you are trying to do, but even more what comes through you as a person. I don't say this to be flattering although that, perhaps, is reason enough. I say it because I have never known another person through whom Jesus is so clearly compelling and powerfully present as he is through you . . . Through you I know myself to be in touch with God, and the deepest possibilities and realities of human life.¹⁸

It is unfortunate that much preaching falls short of its possibilities simply because the preacher says what he thinks he ought to say, instead of what he really thinks and

¹⁸Letter from Jack Condon to Theodore Parker Ferris, October 10, 1970.

feels. The wise preacher says no more than he really means. What he does say then, has the weight of sincerity and reality which more than makes up for any loss that might occur as a result of his understatement of faith.

"The preaching I try to do," says Ferris, "is perfectly simple, trying to think something through, but I let the congregation draw the conclusions."¹⁹

Good Will: In a sermon entitled "He Performed Miracles", he demonstrates his integrity while establishing rapport with his hearers. He does this by illustration. As a minister he is visiting a parishioner's home. The parishioner, who is everyman, is sick and in pain. "Can I make you well immediately?" he asks:

All I can say is that I never have. There are some, I believe who can, but I never have, and I have never known anyone personally who was so cured or who effected such a cure. Or your child has died. Can I raise him from the dead and bring him back to life? All I can say is that I never have. I never expect to. Or you haven't enough food for the next few days. Can I go to the refrigerator and multiply the little food that is there? I never have; I never expect to. Or your house is in danger; a hurricane is coming. Can I stop the storm? All I can say is that I never have, and I have never known anyone who did.²⁰

These questions identify the preacher with the congregation. It is apparent that both he and they are looking for answers. This elicits good will from the hearers and

¹⁹The Boston Globe, (July 15, 1942), p. 18.

²⁰Theodore Parker Ferris, What Jesus Did (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 12-3.

paves the way for logical proof.

Logos. The constituents of logical proof are generally regarded as "evidence" and "argument". A speaker's logical capabilities are involved in the nature of the problems he recognizes whether they are in the center of people's needs or are eccentric or egocentric. His analysis of these problems and the fertility of his mind in suggesting solutions; his capacity in formulating the ideas he has gathered; whether they will appear as a mass of isolated items or in an ordinary combination so as to help find a solution to a problem and provoke action; and finally, his judgment in discriminating between what is essential and non-essential are all part of the process.

Ferris' logical capacity is seen in the way he arranges his evidence. In each sermon a dramatic text from the Bible is chosen and described in its contextual and historical setting. This is followed by an assertion that there is a similarity between the Biblical situation and some specific situation in the lives of individuals or society.

The body of the sermon consists in stating the important points and situations in the biblical story and making relevant applications between them and the present situation. To illustrate this we will return to his sermon "He Performed Miracles" and show how he gathered his evidence.

Evidence: The text used is: "Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick brought them unto him, and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them."

He makes the statement that for centuries it was the miracles which drew people to Christ. Now the miracles are more likely to keep people away from him. Yet our attitude toward miracles is ambivalent. On the one hand we are suspicious of them. On the other hand we are looking for them all the time.

He then assembles a catalog of extraordinary material:

Mozart wrote a concerto when he was five years old; Saint Francis could preach to the birds; Dr. Trudeau, a victim of tuberculosis, went to the Adirondacks to die, and found in that place a cure for the disease.

Mahatma Gandhi did incredible things. But the stories his followers told about the things he did, including healing the sick and raising the dead, were so excessive in their extravagance that he had to deny them.

Joshua made the sun stand still; Elijah multiplied food and ascended into heaven in a whirlwind; Elisha raised a boy from the dead; Peter and John healed a lame man; Peter was let out of prison by an angel; Paul brought a young man back to life who had fallen out of an open window.

Jesus never used his power to feed himself when he was hungry, or to save himself when he was dying, nor did he use it to promote his cause - the kingdom.

From this extraordinary evidence, Ferris displays his logical capacity by arranging the materials so that the following argument emerges:

Argument: Extraordinary people do extraordinary things.

The more extraordinary a person is the more people are inclined to exaggerate the stories about the things he does.

All the extraordinary things that Jesus is reported to have done are also reported to have been done by other men both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

Especially noticeable about these unusual facts of Jesus is the fact that Jesus never used his power for his own sake.

The logic is impressive, but it is not sufficient in itself to convince or persuade, so we turn to emotional proof.

Pathos. Emotional proof is thought of as being the element in public address that energizes the conduct of the hearers. "Emotional proof" writes Thonssen, "is designed to put the listeners in a frame of mind to react favorably to the speaker's purpose."²¹

Some of the classical rhetoricians held that logical and emotional appeals form a dualism which play supporting roles to each other in the rhetorical process. Logic clarifies thought and informs the mind, thus appealing to the intellect, while emotional appeals act upon a person's feelings and thus energize the will to respond.

In his lectures on preaching, Ferris says:

To preach is to make some aspect of the gospel both perceived and felt. To see is not enough. To high visibility in religion must be added deep emotional appreciation and appropriation. It is the function

²¹Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, Speech Criticism (New York: The Ronald Press, 1948), p. 359.

of the sermon to encourage both.²²

He illustrates this dualism by a reference to music:

Take for example, a singer who is beginning to lose heart . . . There are two things he can do. He can take a coaching lesson. If the coach is a good one, he can go over all the rules of breathing, the phrasing, the interpretation of songs, as well as the voice production. He can tell him what he ought to do. Or the singer can go to a concert and hear a great singer sing . . . He can hear the songs sung as they were meant to be sung, and when he comes away, he is a new creature.²³

This is also true about preaching. "A sermon," says Ferris, "is more like an artistic experience than a moral one. It is more like a concert than a coaching lesson. People should come away saying something like this: 'If that's what it's like: I'd better get to my practicing.'"²⁴

He demonstrates this potential in the conclusion of his sermon "He Performed Miracles". After having asked the questions "Can I make you well immediately" etc. and answering each time in the negative, he asks the question: "What then can I do?"

Am I, and all the other ministers of Christ left helpless with my hands tied behind my back? I do not think so for an instant. I can bring you Him in a way that is beyond my power of understanding . . . I may not even say anything about him, but I can bring him into your home, he who once did wonders because God was in him and whose power is now at work in the world.

You can accept him . . . If you do, then almost

²²Theodore Parker Ferris, Lectures on Preaching, unpublished notes.

²³Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 21.

²⁴Ibid.

anything can happen! Whatever strength you need, bodily, mentally, spiritually, will be given you; perhaps not always instantaneously, but after a long period of pain and anxiety. But it will be given you. The food you need will be provided, one way or another. The storm may not be stopped, but you will have the power to ride it. Your dead may not be raised, but the fear of death in you will be laid completely low forever. And what is more, you will be a new creature.²⁵

And everyone said "Amen!"

ARRANGEMENT

The second canon of rhetoric is "disposition" or "arrangement". This canon is closely associated with invention; in fact they cannot be thought of as two separate functions, but two parts that overlap and help each other in originating and organizing the thoughts that make up a speech.

Cicero conceived of this canon as consisting of the speaker's duty "to dispose and arrange his matter, not only in a certain order, but with a sort of power and judgment."²⁶

Ferris' understanding of the concept is quite similar to the traditional. In his lecture notes he asks the question: "How am I going to arrange the material to develop the idea?" He answers his question with an aphorism: "If it isn't arranged at all, the people will be deranged

²⁵Theodore Parker Ferris, What Jesus Did (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 13.

²⁶Cicero, De Oratore, p. 178.

when you get through."²⁷

It is evident that he had some strong convictions on this point of rhetoric that are definitely expressed in his theory and forcefully demonstrated in his practice. He maintains that "the secret, as it is in all art, is the perfect balance between significant content and effective form."²⁸

Most sermons, he claims, take either one or two forms. The first is similar to the tone poem which finds its unity in the general impression it creates rather than in the development of the material. Such a sermon creates a mood. It is impressionistic by nature.

The other form is similar to the sonata. It is simple and inflexible. First comes the introduction and then the statement of the main theme. Then the main theme is explored and elaborated and a second theme is often introduced. Finally, there is the recapitulation and coda and the composition is brought to a close.

That Ferris invariably follows the sonata form is apparent from the following letter written by a music professor at Bennington College:

I wonder if you know that your sermons are written in sonata form. The presentation of a problem in Biblical terms is the first theme, and in everyday

²⁷Theodore Parker Ferris, Lectures on Preaching, unpublished notes.

²⁸Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 53.

terms it's the second theme in a related key. Then you develop and recapitulate both these themes ending with the prayer as a coda.²⁹

The advantages of such an arrangement are manifold. It is simple enough to sustain the most elementary material on the one hand, and yet can be stretched to become the scaffolding for the most profound thought on the other. What is more, the structure appeals to those who are searching for the truth not only with their hearts, but also with their minds.

The Introduction

The first section of a sermon in the sonata form is the introduction. Most often Ferris begins with the Word of God. Occasionally he begins with the people, some problem they are facing, some question in their minds, some shortcoming in their lives. But whatever approach is taken, the introduction is always brief.

The introduction of a sermon might be compared to the launching of a ship. When the cords are once released and the ship begins to slip into the sea, there is nothing more disastrous than for the mechanism to go awry and for the ship to scrape and scratch its way into the water. Launchings both of ships and sermons, should be clean, free and quick.³⁰

The Development

²⁹Letter from Bennington College Music Professor (signature unreadable) to Theodore Parker Ferris, November 5, 1965.

³⁰Ferris, Go Tell the People, p. 69.

The next part of the sermon in the sonata form is development. This is the most difficult part, and there are various ways in which Ferris accomplishes it:

The simplest way is to proceed with a list of three or four parts. For example, the subject might be contained in the question "What Keeps People From Believing in God?" The three parts might be:

The unconscious influence of science.
The suffering of a human being,
The obscurity of God.³¹

A second way is to break the main theme into three parts and present them in a logical and progressive development. For example, the Epistle and Gospel texts might be combined: "So run that you may obtain," and "So the last shall be first." The two texts not only suggest the difference between Jesus and Paul but also suggests that religion comes in two moods, active and passive. The three parts might be:

There is no real life without effort.
But effort by itself is not enough.
Effective actions grow out of moments of passivity.³²

A third possibility is to divide the sermon into two large blocks of equal size.³³

He does this in a sermon called "The Battle Against Unhappiness". This is one in a series of three which include "The Battle Against Disease"; and "The Battle Against Sin". The sermon is divided into two parts introduced by the line: "Consider two classic strategies in the Battle Against Unhappiness: the strategy of detachment and the strategy of attachment." The second part is introduced by the statement "But there is a third category suggested by the word commitment."

³¹Ibid. p. 70. ³²Ibid. p. 71. ³³Ibid. p. 73.

Still another way is to divide the sermon into two contrasting sections with two contrasting texts. The two texts might be "O for the wings of a dove," and "Take my yoke upon you." The conclusion is found in the truth that freedom "is to be found in a yoke rather than in wings."³⁴

The Conclusion

Plato's concept of a form of speech was that it had three parts: a beginning, a middle and an end.

Every speech ought to be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own, so as to be neither without head, nor without feet, but to have both a middle and extremities, described proportionately to each other and to the whole.³⁵

Ferris' sonata form makes provision for an introduction, development and conclusion, but the meaning is the same.

Because he maintains that the sermon is an art form, Ferris insists that the development of the sermon will determine the nature of the conclusion. Sometimes this calls for a recapitulation, sometimes an anecdote, "or even a poem if chosen wisely."³⁶

Sometimes the text may be kept until the end. Its function then is to gather up all the loose ends of the sermon and hold them up in its grasp before the people. But whatever, the conclusion should be short, and should avoid "all platitudes, generalities and abstractions."³⁷

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Thonssen and Baird, p. 397.

³⁶Ferris, Go Tell the People, p. 92. ³⁷Ibid.

STYLE

Style is the third constituent and is related to the way in which a speaker clothes his thoughts and ideas with language. Cicero's definition, which conceived of style as "a speaker's activity "in clothing and decking his thoughts with language,"³⁸ is still held to be an adequate definition.

A more contemporary statement suggests that style is "the concept of expression in language, resulting basically from the choice of words and their arrangement of composition."³⁹ This definition shows style to be a very personal quality of speech, and perhaps there is a closer relationship between it and the speaker's personality than is true with some of the other constituents.

Broadus in his book On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons, believes that:

the style is the man.
Language is a part of a man's character.
Every man should have his own style
as he has his own nose.⁴⁰

Style is related to the artistic elements of invention - "in fact style appears to be the resultant quality in communication that is produced when language and personality are combined."⁴¹ And it is important, because it conditions

³⁸Cicero, p. 178.

³⁹Thonssen and Baird, p. 406.

⁴⁰Broadus, p. 233.

⁴¹Thonssen and Baird, p. 406.

the mind of the hearer, and opens it to the thoughts and ideas developed in communication."⁴²

The three constituents of style are choice of words, composition of sentences, and embellishment of thought. These constituents have as their objective two qualities: clearness and impressiveness. Our analysis of Ferris' theory of style will be arranged under the three constituents.

Choice of Words

It is generally held that the first requirement in achieving an effective style is that the words employed by the speaker to convey his thoughts to his hearers be correct, clear and appropriate. In our study of Ferris' theory we have found positive and clear support of this principle. His strong convictions regarding the importance of words is shown in the following quotations:

1. Be simple. If you cannot say what you have to say in terms that at least a high school student can understand, don't say it. The story you have to tell is only spoiled by your excessive attempts to be profound. No one is truly profound until he is simple.⁴³

2. Theological language in a sermon is normally as out of place as botanical language in a garden.⁴⁴

3. Besides the technical language that often blocks the life of a sermon, there is also the language that might be called religious jargon, words like grace . . . fellowship, eternal life, faith - words which are thoroughly good in themselves but which like coins have been worn thin by much usage. Don't use them!⁴⁵

⁴²Ibid. p. 430. ⁴³Ferris, Go Tell the People, p.114.

⁴⁴Ibid. pp. 28-9. ⁴⁵Ibid. p. 29.

Composition of Sentences

In Go Tell the People, Ferris gives little direction regarding this constituent except to say that if the purpose of the sermon is to reveal God, certain conditions are imposed upon the language in which the sermon is written:

1. It will be written in the indicative mode "for that is the only mode which reveals."⁴⁶
2. It will be written in the present tense "for revelation, by and large, is a contemporary experience."⁴⁷

Ferris himself was a master of the spoken word. While other preachers concentrated on writing for the eye, he learned the texture of writing for the ear. Indeed, in the preface of most of his books he repeats the statement: "Sermons are meant to be heard not read."⁴⁸

It comes as somewhat of a surprise that he never wrote out the sermon in advance. He always preached extemporaneously. His sermon was recorded and then transcribed by one of the secretaries and then finally corrected and edited by himself.

While there was no manuscript, he was constantly writing notes. He could speak extemporaneously because he had already done the writing. His notebooks were full of passages which later appeared almost verbatim in the spoken word. He was extremely disciplined when he wrote, listening

⁴⁶Ibid. p. 18. ⁴⁷Ibid. p. 29.

⁴⁸Theodore Parker Ferris, This is the Day (Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1951), p. 6.

in his mind to the sound of each word, each combination of syllables, each phrase when joined to others to create the movement of language.

Because he always wrote for the ear and not for the eye his paragraphs were fairly long with a mixture of short and long sentences. Occasionally he would use a succession of short sentences, which staccato-like, had force, clarity and swiftness. His models were Strunk, L. J. Tizard, and the sermons of Paul Tillich. With them he had a preference for short, strong, familiar words. He relied on strong nouns and verbs. He used adjectives and adverbs sparingly. And he used sensuous rather than abstract, and specific rather than general words. He agreed with his mentor, Walter Russell Bowie, that the words that count

are the vital words that call up pictures and color in the mind. These are the words that poets use and the man who is to preach should read poetry and learn to love it, if his own expression is to reach above the ground.⁴⁹

That Ferris succeeded in his choice of words is apparent from the following letter written by an admiring parishioner:

Your prose style must be the envy of every English teacher and would be writer in what is left of Western Christendom. I suspect that most of your audience simply regard your sermons as 'wonderful' without reflecting that it takes a life-time of severe self-discipline to pare off and jettison every unnecessary word, leaving the quintessential thought simply and

⁴⁹Walter Russell Bowie, Preaching (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 201.

clearly expressed and unadorned by confusing embroidery.⁵⁰

Embellishment of Thought

Ferris' eloquence is like the elegance of a simple bare tree. The style follows Lysias.⁵¹ It is "Attic" and plain.

It is fascinating to see how the critics through the centuries have praised the plain:

If I were to address myself to a tribunal of only wise men, I would cut off much from the speeches, not only of Cicero, but even of Demosthenes . . . for, in speaking to such an audience, there will be no necessity for soothing the ear with delight . . . since wise men will not be moved by that.⁵²

- Quintilian

Perspicuity is the first requirement of the preacher's style. As discourses spoken there (in church) are calculated for the instruction of all sorts of hearers, plainness and simplicity should reign in them.⁵³

- Blair

The less attention the style attracts to the mechanics of word composition, the more energy will be available to appreciate the ideas in the discourse.⁵⁴

- Spencer

⁵⁰Letter from James Otis to Theodore Parker Ferris, January 17, 1966.

⁵¹Thonssen and Baird, p. 42.

⁵²Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory, XII, x 51-54.

⁵³Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (London: n.d.), p. 343.

⁵⁴Herbert Spencer, "The Philosophy of Style," Westminster Review, New Series 58: 446, (October, 1852.), pp. 436-7.

The plain style, with its predominant qualities of clearness and logical subtlety is best suited to the purpose of instruction.⁵⁵

- J. F. D'Alton

Newsweek magazine described Ferris' preaching as being "transparently simple in style but never shallow."⁵⁶ A parishioner referred to his sermons as being "simple without being obvious - works of art - prose poems in four dimensions, height, depth, breadth and core."⁵⁷ They were characterized by an economy of words, spoken in a crystal style, in which razor-sharp questions were attacked with mind-sticking epigrams like the following:

Evolution can give an account of the development of life from slime to sainthood.⁵⁸

People are always inclined to lose their balance between the star and the stable.⁵⁹

The sympathy of Jesus is with the Prodigal and not with the prudent.⁶⁰

⁵⁵J. F. D'Alton, Roman Literary Theory and Criticism, (London: 1931), pp. 74-5.

⁵⁶"Faith Comes by Hearing - Ten of the Greatest American Preachers," Newsweek, (March 28, 1955), pp. 56-7.

⁵⁷Letter from Constance Worcester to Theodore Parker Ferris, May 20, 1961.

⁵⁸Theodore Parker Ferris, (transcribed sermon, March 21, 1943.)

⁵⁹Theodore Parker Ferris, (transcribed sermon, December 29, 1953.)

⁶⁰Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Elder Brother" (transcribed sermon, February 22, 1948.)

Cling to a person and not a proposition.⁶¹

You cannot wallow with the swine six days a week
and soar with the angels on the seventh.⁶²

Just as parables can go places where principles
cannot, so people can go places where propositions
cannot.⁶³

Our problem is to decrease the distance between
what we preach and what we practice . . . to the degree
to which we succeed, we will make our practice more
nearly match our preaching.⁶⁴

MEMORY AND DELIVERY

These two constituents are given consideration
together in this section. We are aware of the fact that
"thought" memory and "word" memory are not ordinarily given
significant treatment today. However, in the classical
theory "memory" was listed as the fourth canon, and it
received comprehensive treatment in the works of several
Roman rhetoricians. But from the eighteenth century to the
present time, this constituent has received very insignif-
icant treatment in rhetorical literature except in
Lionel Crocker's book Public Speaking for College Students
where he devotes an entire chapter to this topic.⁶⁵

⁶¹Theodore Parker Ferris, "Religion on the Lower
Level" (transcribed sermon, November 9, 1947.)

⁶²Theodore Parker Ferris, Lectures on Preaching,
unpublished notes.

⁶³Ibid. ⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Thonssen and Baird, p. 80.

Memory

As a canon of speech "memory" was the term used by the Roman rhetoricians to embrace the speaker's mastery of all the materials of his speech - both thoughts and words - in orderly sequence in his mind for oral delivery. Perhaps the modern rhetoricians are justified in letting "memory" as a distinct constituent fade into the background, since it is held by them that "memory" per se is a part of delivery. However, I have chosen to list "memory" in this study because of the position it occupies in Ferris' theory and preaching.

In preaching his sermons Ferris always worked out on paper what he intended to say. In that way he saved himself from the shallowness which marks the preaching of a person who assumes that a few jottings and a certain glibness of speech, are sufficient to equip him to preach.

His next step was to abbreviate the notes into an outline. Unlike other preachers he did not jot down topics as the chief headings. Each of his headings was a complete sentence. He would then memorize the outline, and on Sunday morning he would go into the pulpit without a note.

In a transcribed sermon entitled "To Care and Not to Care" he writes about this process, and tells how he changed his mind:

When I first started to preach I always preached without notes. I was taught to do it that way. So that, added to the normal, natural nervousness that everyone has when he stands up to do anything before

other people, I had the added anxiety of feeling that I might forget the progression of the outline.

Year after year I went through that and as the years accumulated, that fear increased until I finally said to myself, Why am I doing this? Am I doing it because I think preaching without notes will show forth the glory of God and proclaim the gospel more adequately than if I did it with them?

I had to admit to myself that was not the reason at all. I was doing it for my own satisfaction. It was the kind of feat that I was proud of and when I saw that I said to myself that is not worth caring about, and in caring about it I am detracting from my total usefulness as a preacher.

From that time on I took my outline with me into the pulpit and relieved that much of the inevitable anxiety of preaching.⁶⁶

Ferris like many preachers had a real problem with nervousness. Writing about this, he said:

Here and there you find a preacher who is never nervous. Most of them are. My own experience is that the ones who are never nervous are never any good. Their strings are not tight enough to make music.

As one of the less hardy ones, I pass on this solace that I received a long time ago from a book on public speaking . . . 'Don't forget that your nervousness is the price you pay for being a race-horse instead of a cow.'⁶⁷

Delivery

This constituent which includes the vocal utterance and bodily action employed by the speaker in communicating his thoughts to his listeners, received scant attention in Ferris' theory. He has only two suggestions to make:

⁶⁶Theodore Parker Ferris, "To Care and Not to Care" (transcribed sermon, May 5, 1963.)

⁶⁷Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951.) p. 109.

Remember the people. We may know them he writes, but we don't always talk to them as if we did:

We talk to them as if they were first century Christians. They are not. We talk to them as though they were afraid of God. They are not. As though they were uneducated. They are not. As though they were poor. They are not. As though they lived in pre-Copernican times. They do not.⁶⁸

Be natural. "You are not," he says:

putting on a great public performance at which the people are spectators who have come to watch you . . . you are not there to do stunts in front of them. You are there to talk to them . . . ⁶⁹

His advice is to speak as one would to a friend:

One of the unresolved mysteries of the universe is the mystery of preachers who when they get in the pulpit . . . have a voice that no one has ever heard before . . . so that the people who listen to him think to themselves, Who is that? Why can't he be himself?⁷⁰

No one would accuse Theodore Parker Ferris of not being himself! What is more there was no trace of nervousness that anyone could see. All he took with him into the pulpit were one or two 3 x 5 cards on which his outline was meticulously written in long hand.

How he managed to speak extemporaneously from those 3 x 5 cards with the careful phrasing of a manuscript and the informal delivery of speech, is beyond our understanding. The mastery of this art enabled him to compress a book into

⁶⁸Theodore Parker Ferris, Lectures on Preaching, unpublished notes.

⁶⁹Ferris, Go Tell the People, pp. 111-2.

⁷⁰Ibid. pp. 113-4.

twenty minutes. His straight from the shoulder directness enabled him to speak to the sophisticated as well as to the more humble. He had a unique gift of making the individual in the pew aware that he was speaking to him or her. The performance was all the more spellbinding because, unlike a concert pianist, he had no opportunity to practice thousands and thousands of times. To the uninitiated and the ignorant and the unimaginative it "looked easy". How little did they know.

No wonder, when Harvard conferred on him the Doctor of Divinity degree, the citation read:

Theodore Parker Ferris - Doctor of Divinity
His brilliant ministry reveals again
the creative power of the Spoken Word!

Chapter 3

THEODORE PARKER FERRIS - HIS MESSAGE

Boston's Back Bay Trinity Church is as rich in age and tradition, as it is in gilt carvings and stained glass. Mention its name, and anyone who knows the history of the pulpit thinks immediately of Phillips Brooks.

Ferris never knew him, but he lived under his spell. When he was a boy he read a novel about him called The Bishop's Shadow. When he went to Harvard, one of the first things he did was to find the church where he preached. When he became rector of Trinity he lived in his house; he stood in his pulpit; his cane was in his umbrella stand; his table was in his living room; and he prepared his sermons at the dining room table where Phillips Brooks entertained his host of friends.

Every once in a while he would take down a volume of A.V.G. Allen's Life of Phillips Brooks, or read one of the volumes of Brook's sermons. Whenever he did he could see by way of the printed page "the stature of the man, and the power that he had."¹

In many ways, Phillips Brooks created and continues to influence the climate of Trinity Church. It is a hard

¹Theodore Parker Ferris, "To Our Need"
(transcribed sermon, December 6, 1953.)

climate to describe, but one can at least say that it is an invigorating mixture of conservative and liberal.

Theologically and ecclesiastically, it has been liberal for at least one hundred years. In a remarkable way, Phillips Brooks was free from literalism before biblical criticism began. He had a free-standing altar with a table going around it, before the liturgical movement was born. He welcomed all Christians to Communion one hundred years before the General Convention gave its approval, and he preached in churches of every name so long as he could preach the gospel.

The result was that since his time Trinity Church has been ecumenical. On any Sunday when Ferris was rector one could look out in the congregation and see a Methodist bishop, or a Lutheran pastor, or a Roman Catholic layperson. This has been true through all the years. Trinity Church was ecumenical in spirit before the ecumenical movement began, and it tried to interpret the creeds in terms of current language and modern understanding before the advent of the new theology.

Socially and politically, the tradition of the church is conservative. Trinity was one of the last large parishes on the eastern seaboard to free its pews. As a church it has never been actively involved in or sponsored a demonstration of anything: civil rights, the Vietnam protest, or any other particular cause. By tradition it does not move out quickly and easily in the secular world.

It is greatly concerned with what happens in the church itself, with the worship of God and the ministry of Christ to his people; that it be done as well as it can be done; and that everything be provided for those who are entrusted with the task of leading it. But it has not been as adventurous as some churches; it has not moved out into areas that seem to be outside the church, in places where people are lost and forgotten, where the tensions in society are grave.

The line between Church and State has not often been crossed by members of the congregation. Individual members of the church have been generally active in every conceivable area of life, from hospitals to prisons, from settlement house to slum, from women's rights to civic wrongs. But the church itself has not been involved in these areas.

With this, Ferris was in complete agreement. It was an echo of something deep-seated in his own temperament. He deeply believed that the profoundest effects on history have come as the unanticipated by-products of lives that have been intent on spiritual things. He declared:

We want to keep Trinity Church a house of God in which people can feel the presence of God, and from which they will go back into the world strengthened to do his will and to bear one another's burdens.²

Early in his ministry he decided: "I am not going to scold the people. I am not going to tell them what they

²Theodore Parker Ferris, "The House of God" (transcribed sermon, October 24, 1946.)

ought to do and what they ought not to do . . . I am not going to try to make them good."³ Beyond that he knew what he wanted to do:

I want to tell them something about God, his life in Christ and in us. I want to do something even more than that. I want to show them something about God, for I know that unless they see God, they will never see themselves - their lives, their mistakes, their responsibilities, their potentialities and their destinies.⁴

Ferris realized the difficulties involved. How could one, for example, expect to reveal more than a partial disclosure of the Divine? If one could show only one aspect of God, what aspect could it be? And how does one avoid the pitfall into which so many preachers stumble, of showing one side of God Sunday after Sunday?

In his book Go Tell the People, he suggested that it might help the preacher to decide what aspect of God he wanted to reveal, if he were to know that sermons could be classified into four groups: prophetic, didactic, evangelical and therapeutic.

1. First of all there is the prophetic sermon, "which is an attempt to reveal some aspect of the purpose or will of God in reference to some event or movement in human history."⁵

2. Then comes the didactic sermon, "which is an attempt to reveal some aspect of the truth of God in reference to some human problem or concern."⁶

3. Then there is the evangelical sermon, "which is an attempt to reveal some aspect of the love of God

³Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 33.

⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid. ⁶Ibid.

as it is in Christ Jesus and to draw men to him."⁷

4. And finally there is the therapeutic sermon, "which is an attempt to reveal some aspect of the healing power of God in reference to some human ill or ailment."⁸

In our analysis of his message we shall discover that all four classifications were evident in his preaching.

PROPHETIC

Ferris put that first because he believed that the age in which he lived was a time of historical and political confusion. To him, the message of the prophet was to remind people that current history is but a page or two from the history of the universe. It is related to all that has gone before and all that is to follow. It makes sense, but it is only a small part of the development of God's purpose.

The prophet owes the people the debt of plain speaking in love. At times he must shock them out of their lethargy and shake them out of their prejudices. The effectiveness of the shock depends upon two things: that the people know that he loves them, and that he doesn't do it too often.

He also owes it to them to interpret as well as he can what is happening in the world around them. They are bewildered by the upheaval. Some think they know the cause of it, but many times their answers are too simple to be

⁷Ibid. ⁸Ibid.

true. "When a person," he says:

blames the Supreme Court for all the unrest in the country, he needs to be gently but firmly set right. When a good person sincerely believes that a policeman with a stick and a gun is the answer to all our problems, he needs what may amount to a complete overhauling of his thinking. Needless to say, this will not be accomplished in one sermon. This may be the work of a lifetime.⁹

Ferris took the long view. As he read the pages of history it appeared to him that whenever the Church played a leading role in human affairs it almost always lost ground. The more effective it became in the political arena, the less influence it had in the moral and spiritual realm. When the Church completely identified itself with any movement or institution, no matter how good it may have been, it lost to that extent its unique power.

"What could be more righteous," he asked:

than the move toward social justice which began in the twenties and flourished in the thirties? And yet what institutional machinery for the implementation of those ideals could be either equated to or identified with the Kingdom of God? Individual Christians, spurred on by their leaders . . . influenced enormously the move toward social justice. At the same time the Church was, and must always be, sufficiently independent of the action to be able to say, Well done, so far! But not all is well, not yet.¹⁰

What we must remember is that Ferris' viewpoint was colored by the context in which he lived. All his life he was on the winning side of society. His family never had

⁹Theodore Parker Ferris, "Revolution and the Church", address to the Boston Diocesan Convention, September 21, 1968.

¹⁰Theodore Parker Ferris, Address to the 84th Annual Meeting of the Church Club of New York, May 3, 1971.

any money; but they had what is sometimes called "position"; they belonged to the establishment, to those in authority.

This inevitably affected his attitude toward social issues. He dared to believe, however, that his Christian training could at least partially lift him above the level of his natural disposition, and give him a place from which he could look upon the scene with the detachment of a mature person. Whether or not he succeeded, can be judged by his response to what were probably the most controversial issues of his day: Civil rights and the War in Vietnam.

Civil Rights

Ferris was concerned that the leaders of the church would allow themselves to become so involved in the urgency for civil rights or in the crusade to save the cities, that they would be diverted from their most basic commitment. They could become so ardently engaged in the battle for civil rights, that they would have little time or interest left for the battle that individuals are fighting against sin, sickness and sorrow.

"If in the course of his ministry," he argued:

a man should decide that his real interest is in the ghetto revolution, or that he can be more effective as the leader of a student uprising than he can as the shepherd of a flock that shows little interest or capacity to rise up at all, he can say so, and at least temporarily change his base from one field to the other.¹¹

¹¹Theodore Parker Ferris, Lectures on Preaching, unpublished notes.

As a consequence of his position, he came perilously close to divorcing himself from the great prophetic tradition in which he stood, and allowing himself to be joined to the religious irrelevants around him. A close examination of his preaching during those years uncovered only the following:

Whenever racial or labor groups are discriminated against, whether they be right or wrong, good or bad,¹² it is the prophet's place to stand up and say 'stop'.

and again:

In one way I hesitate to quote Theodore Parker, the great reformer of the 19th century, because it has been said that I am a follower of his. I am neither his namesake nor his follower, and I disagree with him on a great many theological issues . . . but for this I am proud of him. He was fighting slavery in the north in the years before the Civil War.¹³

and one further allusion:

You marvel that the spirit of Christ can survive at all . . . and yet, just when you think it might have been snuffed out completely, down there in Montgomery Alabama, where the colored race is having such a hard time to win its freedom, instead of fighting for it they are suffering under the leadership of a Christian minister. The Christ-Spirit can't be killed.¹⁴

For the rest there was silence. No more was said until 200,000 people marched into the city of Washington. This demonstration challenged Ferris. To begin with, he

¹²Theodore Parker Ferris, "Stop" (transcribed sermon, February 18, 1955.)

¹³Theodore Parker Ferris, "What the Bible Says" (transcribed sermon, November 20, 1955.)

¹⁴Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Sepulchre and the Sun" (transcribed sermon, April 21, 1957.)

was not a demonstrative person. He kept his feelings pretty much to himself, and if he did express them, he usually understated them. He was convinced that demonstrations did more harm than good; that they built up resistance in those against whom they were directed and that those in power were likely to be more determined than they were in the first place. He believed that no demonstration had "the power of a revelation." "There is more power," he said, "in the single story about the Good Samaritan than in all the demonstrations that have ever taken place in the history of the world."¹⁵

To him and his generation, the Washington March was not the way. Their way was the individual casting his ballot in secret; expressing his opinion either in the town meeting or in the local newspaper, or in the editorial if he was editor of the paper. That was their way: the power of informed, responsible individuals.

It was an article in a newspaper that had the effect of striking Ferris like a blow. It was written on the day following the March. James Reston, in his column, made the statement that "the first significant test of the Negro march in Washington will come in the churches and synagogues of the country this weekend."¹⁶ It was made quite clear

¹⁵Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Good Shepherd" (transcribed sermon, May 31, 1963.)

¹⁶James Reston, "The March," New York Times, August 30, 1963. p. 30.

that if nothing happened in the churches nothing would happen in Congress. He went on to say:

As moral principles preceded and inspired political principles, as the Church preceded Congress, so there will have to be a moral revulsion to the humiliation of the Negro before there can be a significant political relief.¹⁷

Ferris stopped to think about Trinity Church. What had happened in it that weekend? Nothing. At least nothing was said about the March or its purpose. Reston's article lay heavily upon his conscience. It prompted him to say the following Sunday: "I am not sure that preaching in and by itself will change anybody's mind, but . . . for better or worse I am going to say now what I think about civil rights from a Christian point of view."¹⁸

The following are some excerpts from that sermon:

There is in the Bible a movement toward the emancipation of men and women . . . It began at the Red Sea when one small tribe broke loose from bondage to another people . . . It ends supremely on Calvary where Jesus, one single human being in whom the fullness of God revealed himself, was free to be himself, and as a consequence frees other people to be themselves. It is liberty born out of sacrifice.

He (Jesus) began a movement toward freedom, and it took some people a long time to see that that movement includes . . . not only freedom from hell, but freedom from humiliation. It is much easier to reach for one than the other.

This movement has now reached a new front . . . In this country Negroes have never been treated before

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Theodore Parker Ferris, "Civil Rights From a Christian Point of View" (transcribed sermon, September 8, 1963.)

the law as human beings. Many of them have been dearly loved and treated with great kindness the way you would treat a child, but when they wanted to vote, they were treated another way.

In the last few years two things have happened. The first is that Negroes in this country now demand to be treated as human beings . . . The other thing . . . is that many white people sincerely want this. They are people who have caught up with the movement of Jesus. Nominally, they may not be Christian, but they are a part of this movement toward freedom and I am proud to claim my association with them.

There are some in this church, I am sure, who think that this whole movement is in the wrong direction. There are some who think that it is contrary to the Bible, and a few who think that it is inspired by Communism. And there are some, I am sure, who are in sympathy with the article that David Lawrence wrote about the March and which he called "The Day of Disgrace". I welcome those people to this congregation. We will never all be of one mind. I do not agree with them. I think they are wrong, but I love them and I want them to be here.¹⁹

Nothing more was ever said. Perhaps nothing more needed to be said.

The War in Vietnam

On a number of occasions before the Vietnam encounter, Ferris had informed the congregation of his views concerning war. He always approached the matter with a certain degree of delicacy. He would say that he could not tell them what to think, or what they ought to think. He couldn't even tell them what the Church's position was, because the Church had no one unanimous point of view. He could only tell them what he thought, in the hope that it

¹⁹Ibid.

might help them to know what they thought.

He recognized that there was a small but valiant group of people who believed that the only way to keep their allegiance to Christ absolute was to refrain from all participation in war. He saw that as undoubtedly simplifying the whole issue, but while it took into good account the non-violent side of love, it left the more northerly, more austere side of love uncovered. It left justice out, it underrated the compulsions of life, and it overlooked the fact that we are all involved in the sins of humanity.

From his point of view he believed that all war is wrong; that it is evil; that it is infantile and in the end futile. He knew, however, that human nature being what it is, some wars have been unavoidable. At least they were unavoidable at the point in which America became involved in them.

The Korean War, for example, was a case in point. He believed that in the beginning it was unavoidable. As time went on he changed his mind. With some hesitation he made the following comments:

I am travelling on very delicate ground, and speaking now from my own personal opinion; a great many people think that it would be well for the Americans to withdraw from Korea at the present time, but, they go on and say, we cannot because we would lose face. Repentance is the willingness to admit that if it is the right thing to do, you do it and lose face, rather than lose a hundred thousand lives.²⁰

²⁰Theodore Parker Ferris, "Our Christian Advantage" (transcribed sermon, December 3, 1950.)

The next Sunday he confessed:

I thought last Sunday when I mentioned . . . my own personal opinion that the United States should admit its error and withdraw from Korea . . . that the building would come down upon me, expressing the disapproval of the majority. I was amazed at the number of people who went out of the church with gratitude in their eyes, solemn, serious and sober, saying "thank you for saying that".²¹

When the situation in Vietnam developed, Ferris thought that the war was unavoidable. He was troubled by it, but chose to trust the government, believing that if it were a necessary action of the United States in defense of the free world, he should support it.

In due time he began to wonder if he could accept everything he read and was told about the war. He had heard too many things on the other side, from people whose judgment and integrity he had no reason to doubt. He tried to be loyal; but . . .

On Thanksgiving Sunday, 1969, he dared to express his personal opinion:

I think that the war in Vietnam is avoidable. I don't presume to blame or try to pin the blame on anyone for starting it when it might have been avoided. The course of events has convinced me that it cannot be won in a military way, and therefore should be stopped.

How this should be done I'm not prepared to say. I am not an expert in foreign affairs and have never pretended to be. I don't know enough about the issues involved, political and economic, to begin to say how and when this should be done. I am not in a position to tell the President of the United States what to do or how to do it. I am, however, in a position to let

²¹Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Tallest Christmas Tree in the World" (transcribed sermon, December 10, 1950.)

people know what I as a human being and as a Christian think and feel about this crucial matter.²²

As the war progressed he became increasingly opposed to it, but said no more until he was faced again with the demonstration movement. Young people by the thousands were gathering in Washington and San Francisco, to demonstrate their opposition. Ferris didn't like them. He didn't like the way they dressed, the way they looked. He liked even less the language they used, the obscenities, the coarseness of it. He resented the way they rejected the past and tried to take over the present; the way they ran after an ideal without grounding it in reality. He was troubled by the division they represented, the rift they were causing in the national unity.

In spite of this, he recognized that it was wrong to judge them by the way they looked. He came to the conclusion that the ones who looked the strangest did so because they did not want to look like him. They didn't like the life his generation had made in the world. They didn't like its scale of values, and they wanted to disassociate themselves from it.

As a result of this discovery he preached a startling sermon which he called "The Good Shepherd and the War". Whereas previously he had always expressed his personal opinions apologetically, in this case there was no apology.

²²Theodore Parker Ferris, "Duty to my Country" (transcribed sermon, Thanksgiving Sunday, 1969.)

As a matter of fact he went a step further by presuming to speak the mind of Christ. He did this by using the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia (the process of putting words in other people's mouths). It was a technique he had learned from Walter Russell Bowie. He began by asking:

Does Christ have anything to say about these things? They are quite remote from him; he lived in Nazareth two thousand years ago. But don't forget that he is alive now . . . He speaks to me when I let him.

The first thing he says is this. I led a demonstration once myself. I rode into the city on a donkey at a very crucial moment - not to attract attention to myself, but to make a point. There comes a time when a man must show his hand, declare himself, make himself known. And that time has come for me!²³

It was a real turn about face for Ferris.

Continuing to speak as though he were Christ, he pleaded with the congregation not to judge the demonstrators by the way they looked. He urged them to get to know them. To discover that some were more real, more honest, more open, more willing to listen than some of the "good people" were.

Finally he had Christ asking:

What about the war? War has one intention; to destroy to kill. It is evil; it always has been, it always will be. Even when it is unavoidable it is unadulterated evil. It lives on brutality, cruelty, atrocity, innocent suffering. In this respect, this war is no different from any other . . . (but) This war is different in two ways. One is that everyone can see it, everyone can see the horror of it as he never has before . . . The second thing is that the

²³Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Good Shepherd and the War" (transcribed sermon, April 25, 1971.)

purpose of it is neither perceived nor felt by the people . . . If it is to free a people, they say, what about the Czechs? . . . what about the Greeks? . . . What about the Spanish? . . . Why do we concentrate on this small country and leave the others to the mercy of history?

The problem . . . is not in the Pentagon. It is in the heart of man; as long as his heart is divided, there will be war of one kind or another . . . If you follow me, I will introduce you to the things that mend your heart, and show you the Father, in whom you will find the real peace which will surpass all your human expectation.²⁴

He did not speak about the war again until the last sermon before he knew he would be undergoing exploratory surgery. It was almost an apology for not having spoken out more often and more forcefully on Vietnam.

DIDACTIC

Next to the prophet stands the teacher. It is his role to interpret the meaning of things. He realizes that the Christian gospel is not a principle, proposition or philosophy; it is a story. It is the teacher's function to explain the story in a language the people can understand.

One thing is certain, he will never be able to interpret it unless he knows the story himself, unless he understands it intellectually and feels it emotionally. Another thing he can be sure of, is that he will never get to the point where he no longer has to explain it. There will always be someone to ask: What did Jesus mean when he said that? What does life mean when it comes crashing down?

²⁴Ibid.

What does death mean when it comes like a thief in the night? Obviously, the field to be covered by this kind of preaching is without limit.

Ferris observed that:

Preaching of this kind draws upon the imagination of the preacher as well as upon the tradition of the church. It is not safe preaching. The preacher may in some instances miss the full meaning of what he is trying to reveal. Better that by far than to repeat the old formulas and definitions which are safe because they lead to nowhere beyond the boundaries of conventional thinking.²⁵

No one could say that Ferris was a conventional thinker. He was born too late to rest comfortably in traditional orthodoxy. He was born too soon to be caught up in the wave of neo-orthodoxy. He was led to classify himself as a "liberal catholic, in the evangelical protestant camp."²⁶

His teaching was influenced by the climate in which he lived. He always said that he was glad that his "theological thought was shaped by Baron Von Hugel and not by Karl Barth."²⁷ He considered Von Hugel to be one of the permanent influences in his life, along with Rufus Jones of whom he said: "That is the man for me, and for my people."²⁸

²⁵Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 42.

²⁶Theodore Parker Ferris, Lectures on Preaching, unpublished notes.

²⁷Theodore Parker Ferris, Price Lectures, March 2, 1960.

²⁸Theodore Parker Ferris, Price Lectures, March 3, 1954.

Ferris was aware of the fact that the people were turning away from heaven to earth, from the unknown to the known, from the supernatural to the natural. They still believed in God, but they didn't presume to know everything about God. They didn't try to list God's attributes, or to analyze every action that God had taken, or to offer an airtight explanation of every evil that had come their way. They possibly still believed that God made everything, but they didn't try to say exactly how or when. They didn't say so because they didn't presume to know.

If he expected to reach the people with his preaching Ferris knew that he had to keep at his theology so that he not only could teach his subject but be on fire about it. His advice to homiletic students was, "find someone who speaks to you."²⁹ The people, he said, who spoke to him were Tillich, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer and Paul Van Buren.

Theology

Unlike many contemporary preachers, Ferris had no difficulty in accepting the traditional images of God. It is apparent from his preaching that he knew their limitations, yet he never hesitated to use them. He also knew that for many people they presented difficulties. Some people "picture God," he said:

²⁹Theodore Parker Ferris, Lectures on Preaching, unpublished notes.

As a person 'up there' or 'out there' and therefore apart from the universe and life we live. As they picture God, he made the universe, he keeps it going, he watches over it, once upon a time he even came into it, and from time to time he comes to us when we need him, but by and large he is apart from us 'up there' or 'out there'.³⁰

The language of 'up there' and 'out there' is obviously Bonhoeffer, but was prompted by John Robinson's Honest to God. When the book was published it was like a bomb dropped in the still waters of the religious world. Many people were shocked by it; their faith was shaken by it. It made a great many people think, who had not thought about God for a long time. But Ferris didn't know what all the fuss was about. He had lectured on Bonhoeffer in his Lenten "Price Lectures" before Bishop Robinson had appeared on the scene. His response to the "Honest to God" controversy is found in these words:

I personally don't care so much where God is - whether up above, or down beneath, or outside or inside. All I know is that there is a God who will help me . . . There is not only a Creative Power in life, there is also a re-Creative Power - the Power that made you can re-make you. There is not only a Power that lets you get into trouble - (that is gives you the freedom to go your own way and get into trouble) - the Power that lets you get into trouble is the Power that will either get you out of it or see you through it.³¹

The difficulties of a God suspended in space like the man in the moon were of no great consequence to Ferris,

³⁰Theodore Parker Ferris, The Image of God (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.) p. 6.

³¹Theodore Parker Ferris, "In and Out of Trouble" (transcribed sermon, October 6, 1963.)

but he was afraid that Tillich's God of "depth" would lose the dimension of transcendence. He had been taught thirty-five years before that God was both transcendent and immanent; that God was present in the world "like electricity in a wire and yet apart from the world - like the sun."³²

He could see in the new theology that God was neither transcendent nor immanent. The secular God was not in the heavens or on earth, but in human situations. People were finding God in their joy, their tension, and in the claims society was making upon them. The consequence was that there was nothing left to be transcendent; and even though someone might think there was, no one would dare to say it, because it might imply that God was a thing, or an object, or a person.

This he recognized, was one of those inevitable, and on the whole healthy shifts in accent. "It brings us," he said, "down to earth just when we seem to be escaping from earth to outer space. Anything that brings us from the abstract to the concrete is normally good."³³ Then in the next breath, he inserted, "Yet I make a plea for the transcendence of God."³⁴

His experience of God, he admitted was limited, yet he accepted it as it was. It was bound up in two words -

³²Theodore Parker Ferris, Virginia Lectures, unpublished notes, 1965.

³³Ibid. ³⁴Ibid.

revelation and response. "Everything in my life has come to me," he testified, "not as a result of anything I did, but of something done to me. I have not been the initiator, my part was to make the right response."³⁵

When the death of God theology hit the cover of Time magazine, Ferris responded with a sermon entitled "Is God Dead?" It was one of the rare occasions when the sermon was not based on a biblical text. Instead, he chose to tell an anecdote about Mark Twain.

Apparently, Mark Twain made several trips abroad and on one of them the newspapers in America reported his death. When he heard about it, he cabled the following message to the Associated Press: "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." Hidden behind Twain's humor was something more than humor. "We must be prepared for the fact that most reports," suggested Ferris, "even though they turn out to be mistaken, have some basis in truth:"

1. Mark Twain was not dead, but he had gone away. God is not dead, but to neutral observers God has disappeared from the scene.

2. Mark Twain was not always Mark Twain. He was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens. When he took those two words as his nom de guerre, there was a sense in which Samuel Clemens died. It is Mark Twain who lives. In a similar way the old image of God has passed away, and a new image has taken its place.³⁶

For Ferris, the new image of God was Jesus. He did

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Theodore Parker Ferris, "Is God Dead?"
(transcribed sermon, October 24, 1965.)

not believe that Jesus was God, for that statement of identity is neither biblical nor creedal. But he did believe that we should begin with Christ rather than God. As a teacher he always began with the concrete and then moved to the abstract. He was sure that was the way most people understood the truth. He agreed with John Robinson, "that in Jesus Christ we have a window through into ultimate reality itself, into God."³⁷

Christology

"What concerns me more than Christology," he said, "is the Man Christ Jesus:"

I am interested in him as a person. I want to know more about him. I know that I cannot know everything about any person. I know that everything I do know about him comes to me through the eyes of other people.³⁸

Ferris was always more interested in people than in anything else. As a person, Jesus of Nazareth particularly intrigued him. Addressing the Cathedral School of St. Paul's in 1970, he shared the following:

I grew up with Christ - but not as a friend. 'The friend for little children above the bright blue sky' didn't ring even the bells of my childhood, and surely not as a 'pal'. 'Make Jesus your Pal!' - the battle cry of one youth crusade - left me cold.³⁹

³⁷John Robinson, But That I Can't Believe (London: Collins, 1967.) p. 28.

³⁸Theodore Parker Ferris, Virginia Lectures, unpublished notes, 1965.

³⁹Theodore Parker Ferris, Cathedral School of St. Paul's Lectures, unpublished notes, 1970.

Instead, Jesus was his Hero. Not exactly the Hero that most boys would choose. It was Jesus' way with people, especially sick people, that seemed most heroic to him. As he grew older, it was Jesus' way with words that attracted him. He was taught in church that Jesus was the Son of God, and he accepted it, but he didn't think much about it. To him, Jesus was a Man - the Man above all men - the Hero of his drama.

"I think," he said:

it was the drama of his life that first fascinated me. I doubt if I was aware of this until I began to realize in my college years how much I loved the theatre. There I saw the drama of human life before it had become obsessed with the pathological aspects of it. The story of Jesus was the supreme drama.⁴⁰

When he began to study the gospels, first in College with Kirsopp Lake, and then at General Theological Seminary with Dr. Easton, he found the more he knew about Jesus, the more mystified he was by him, and the more mystified he was, the more fascinated he became. Later he began to see in him something more than a Hero. Without even ceasing to be a Hero, he became a Saviour. He became a living presence; and his presence was God. More and more he found in him the clue to the secret of life:

He means everything to me. In him I find the light I need to walk by, the life I need to live by, and the Love I need to save me from making a fool of myself.⁴¹

That is what he believed the Christian community had

⁴⁰Ibid. ⁴¹Ibid.

been saying in one way or another for almost 2,000 years. Each generation had left its finger prints on the tradition, and the finger prints had often blurred the tradition itself. In a sermon entitled "The New Christ", Ferris pointed out:

In the thirteenth century people pictured Christ as King of Kings, Lord of Lords, seated upon a throne, ruling over the affairs of heaven and earth in regal splendor. In the eighteenth century, in 1740, Charles Wesley, the brother of John, gave us quite a different picture when he wrote "Jesus, Lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly." And in the next century, in 1885 another hymn was written "What a Friend we have in Jesus."⁴²

None of these hymns, he felt, spoke in quite the same way they did when they were written, for in the twentieth century people have a different picture of Christ. In the new picture Jesus is neither as regal nor intimate as in previous pictures, and yet he has lost none of his regalness and friendliness. The change has taken place in the people, not in Christ.

The change in Ferris came from reading three books. First, was the Jesus of History, by T. R. Glover; the second was The Manhood of the Master, written by Harry Emerson Fosdick; and the third which was the crucial one - was written by John Knox, and was called The Man Christ Jesus.⁴³

All three were trying to do essentially the same thing. They were trying to peel off the layers of legend

⁴²Theodore Parker Ferris, "The New Christ" (transcribed sermon, March 17, 1968.)

⁴³Ibid.

and theological interpretation in an effort to get back to the original picture and personality of Jesus of Nazareth. They saw him as The Pioneer of Faith, The Great Trail Blazer, The Standard-Bearer, The Promise of a Better World, The Moralist and The Idealist. They looked upon him as the foundation of their optimism about the world, humankind and things in general.

Ferris went beyond the three and saw in Jesus the man who shared the weakness and suffering of human beings; who identified himself with the outsiders; the man who was turned down; a failure not a success. This is the man that Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "The Man for Others."

Commenting on this, Ferris remarked:

We have found God in the manhood of Jesus. We begin not in the skies, but on the ground with the incomparable Man Christ Jesus. When we follow him he leads us further and further, deeper and deeper, until we begin to see the meaning of everything. In him we meet the demands of the ultimate God and we want to make the right response to those demands.⁴⁴

Speaking again, in a sermon called "The Religion About Jesus", he stated: "In Jesus all the love of God is drawn together in one place and made available for human beings."⁴⁵ And again, preaching on "The Divinity of Jesus", he said: "The new note in the Christian gospel is not the

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Religion About Jesus" (transcribed sermon, November 24, 1946.

fact that Jesus is God-like, but that God is Christ-like."⁴⁶

Statements such as these made him suspect in certain circles. People in one place or another began to tell him that they thought he was really a Unitarian. His Christology, as they saw it, was not altogether in line with some of the theology of classic Christianity. This greatly disturbed him. In defense of himself, he declared:

As I grow older, the more sure I am that if there is anything that I could never be it is a Unitarian. And I have always wondered why people thought that I was. I have preached all the time I have been rector of this Church the truth that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. That Jesus was the Word made flesh which gloriously dwelt among us; that in him the fulness of the Godhead was visible. I have expounded the doctrine of the Trinity as faithfully as I know how.

Only recently I have come to see that the reason why people mistook me for a Unitarian in Episcopalian clothing is that when I talk about Jesus as a personality I talk about him as a human being in whom God made himself real to us and not as a semi-mythical being neither completely human nor fully God. This may not be in line with the theology of classic Christianity, but I am convinced that it is entirely in line with the Christianity of the New Testament.⁴⁷

His defensiveness prompted him to look again at the creeds. After a careful examination he concluded that they were not identical with the faith they expressed. Any formula could not be adequate to the faith, and the faith could outgrow any formula the way a butterfly outgrows a cocoon.

"The Chalcedon formula," he contended, "does not say

⁴⁶Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Divinity of Jesus" (transcribed sermon, March 11, 1956.)

⁴⁷Theodore Parker Ferris, "What We Think of Christ" (transcribed sermon, June 2, 1957,)

to us what it has said to others:"

We are more practical than metaphysical by nature. We ask questions, but more likely what shall I do? than what shall I think? Even when we do think, we are more likely to begin with the given fact that is seen and known, than with the idea that is not seen. We begin with Jesus and let him point the way; the way that leads to God - we discern that he is the way.⁴⁸

He suggested there were a number of things one could do in response to the creeds. One could take the position of Harry Emerson Fosdick, and dissociate from any church which committed one to a creedal belief; or one could accept the creeds figurately if not literally; or one could write a creed of one's own.

Ferris decided to do the latter. He found that it was difficult to know exactly what he thought and felt, and even more difficult to put into words with any degree of accuracy what he was thinking. It took him a long time, but he eventually shared the finished product in a sermon called "Uneasiness About the Creeds":

I believe in the Man Christ Jesus
in the way he lived and loved
and in the cross on which he died.
I believe in the God that came alive in him
that spoke through him
and is revealed in him.
I believe in the power of his Spirit
to heal and to reconcile
to seek the wayward and the lost.
I believe in the company of those
who are drawn to him
and in the future to which he points.
I believe in myself;
I accept myself as I am

⁴⁸Theodore Parker Ferris, Virginia Lectures, unpublished notes, 1965.

and I know that without him
I can do nothing.⁴⁹

As a creed it is much less comprehensive than the classic creeds. It says nothing about God the Creator, and makes no attempt to explain metaphysically how God and Jesus are related, or to make any eschatological predictions. It is content to focus on the facts, and to let the facts lead outward to the fringes of mystery.

He was aware of the fact that his creed was dated. It too would pass. What would remain was the tradition. Each generation would make its own interpretation. Ferris believed that he had been faithful to the tradition while continuing to address the issues of the day. A synopsis of his Theology and Christology culled from his preaching might read as follows:

1. The most ultimate reality, is the love that gives itself in obedience to the highest and in service to the lowest; this is the ground of our existence.
2. The Spirit that once raised the dead in Palestine is present and at work among us. If you know Christ you will meet him in the most unexpected places.
3. We are not looking for perfection either in ourselves or in the world; we are looking for salvation. We are not looking for utopia; we are looking for a way to save the situation that we are in at the moment.
4. Only a man, the Man, is worthy to be our Master; that a person not a principle, is the clue to the meaning of everything.
5. We will never be able to express the mystery or the meaning of Christ in purely logical, rational terms.

⁴⁹Theodore Parker Ferris, "Uneasiness About the Creeds" (transcribed sermon, Summer, 1967.)

EVANGELICAL

With this kind of preaching, Ferris stands between two extremes. On the one hand is the fundamentalist, urging people "to come to Jesus and be saved", but never telling what it means or how one continues in salvation. On the other hand is the liberal, whose Jesus is the benevolent benefactor of the human race: recaptured now and then in our memories; aimed at in our ideals; but never present as a Power to save. Ferris was uncomfortable with both extremes: the Christ of the sawdust trail and the Christ of the social seminar. His aim was to communicate the Christ of the gospels.

According to his reading of the New Testament, Jesus never talked to people personally about their sins. He never tried to make a person feel sinful in order to save him. The way he took was never from sin, through guilt to joy. It always began with something that caught the person's attention; filled him with rapture; caused him to repent; and led him to a new life.

An example of this is the story of Peter and the miraculous catch of fish. Peter said to Jesus, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Jesus had made no mention of sin. Peter's luck had been bad that night, and Jesus urged him to try again. When he did, Peter caught so many fish the boat couldn't hold them. He associated that with Jesus, and he said what he did because he was

"astonished". It was the wonder of Jesus that made him feel like a sinner. Preaching on this, Ferris concluded:

"Whenever and wherever you meet the Highest in life, you are more likely to see . . . the lowest in yourself."⁵⁰

Anthropology

Ferris spoke in the first person when discussing the doctrine of man:

I am going to speak in the first person because I know myself more intimately than I know anyone else, and I hope you will translate what I say about myself into the language of your own life.⁵¹

Man. The following is an analysis of his personal and biblical view of man:

a. His personal view

- (1) I am a creature. I did not make myself.
I am a product of my parents; my times;
my country; my climate; God.
- (2) I can't sustain myself.
- (3) I am related to every other creature
from stars to stones.
- (4) I am like no other creature that has ever
lived.
 - (a) I have thorns and talents.
 - (b) I am a bundle of desires.
 - i) some are luxuries.

⁵⁰Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Beginning of the New Creation" (transcribed sermon, October 4, 1959.)

⁵¹Theodore Parker Ferris, "What Am I?" (transcribed sermon, March 13, 1966.)

- a. (4) (b) ii) some are necessities.
- (c) I look at love.
 - i) I need to be loved.
As a child: cared for.
As an adult: cared about.
"I want to be alone,
but I want to be loved,
and I cannot be loved and alone
at the same time."⁵²
 - ii) I also need to love:
it is easier to love -
to take than to give.
I have two temptations:
- to hold back.
- to give to the ones
to whom I am drawn.
- (d) One other necessity:
to make sense out of what I see and do.
- b. His biblical view of man
 - (1) I believe he is a creature free to go
his own way.
 - (2) I believe he is capable of becoming a son
of God.
 - (a) He knows the difference between:
 - i) light and dark.
 - ii) beauty and ugliness.
 - iii) truth and falsehood.
 - iv) good and evil.
 - (b) He makes judgments:
 - i) aesthetic.
 - ii) intellectual.
 - iii) ethical.

The Biblical view of man is neither optimistic nor pessimistic, it is realistic. It contains both the grandeur and the misery of man. In a sermon called "The New Man",

⁵²Ibid.

Ferris describes the grandeur:

There is something beguilingly attractive about man; there always has been and there always will be. His smile can sometimes change the color of everything around him. His beauty more than once has made the stars look dim. His speech can be more enchanting than any music. His desire to love and be loved is insatiable. His goodness often surpasses our understanding.⁵³

Then as if balancing what he has said, he continues by describing the misery:

There is also a crooked streak in him. There always has been and there always will be . . . It breaks out at the most unexpected times and in the most unlikely places - in violence, pride, sensuality, jealousy, self-righteousness. When a man deliberately sets fire to a building in which people are living, when a man deliberately smashes a window with no intention save to destroy, when he kills another human being for "kicks", when he rides roughshod over everyone he meets, or is so locked up in himself that he can never participate in the life that is going on around him, you see that crooked streak. You see it wherever you look, at any and every period of human history, sometimes more crooked than others, and never more so than at the present time.⁵⁴

Sin. As a word, it is probably one of the most unpopular in the vocabulary. Today, it has almost been banned.

(Incidentally, it is interesting to note how several ugly four letter words have displaced in common usage some powerfully great three-letter words.) A person may be a psychopath, or a neurotic, or a psychotic. But he is rarely a sinner.

⁵³Theodore Parker Ferris, "The New Man" (transcribed sermon, March 24, 1968.)

⁵⁴Ibid.

Ferris' definition of sin is divided into its outer and inner manifestations. Outwardly, it means transgression; it is an act that violates the nature of existence, or in a more familiar language - the laws of God. Inwardly, it means alienation from the source of existence. "This," he said "is the sum and substance of our experience, at least of mine."

I know I've done things which I wish I hadn't done. I've lost my patience, missed an opportunity to help, wasted time, been afraid of opposition, been careless about friends when they no longer served a purpose, used my talents in the wrong way (to get attention and approval), put off tomorrow what I could have done today.⁵⁵

Continuing his act of confession, he added:

I know a few other things about myself; I've done things which people wish I hadn't done. I've hurt them, or failed them in some way without knowing it. I know that I can see the failure of others more clearly than I can my own. When I do see them I am more willing to acknowledge them. In other words, I know that my desires get me into trouble. I sometimes do things that I don't really want to do because I know they will get me into trouble, but I can't help it! I am driven to write the caustic note to express my hostility, to have my own way - regardless.⁵⁶

These confessions written in his notebook prompted him to ask the question why? The answers became the basis for his doctrine of sin:

There is evil in the world.

It was not part of the original plan.

It gets hold of me and uses me against my will.

⁵⁵Theodore Parker Ferris, Notebook, n.d.

⁵⁶Ibid.

"I know," he wrote:

that I get into trouble - that I sometimes go wrong. Sometimes I make a careless mistake: I correct it. Sometimes I commit a crime: I can be punished for it. Sometimes I sin: I can suffer for it by separating myself from God.⁵⁷

Ferris recognizes that there are moral laws and natural laws. There are requirements as well as electives. Sin, as he sees it, is a violation of the conditions of our existence. The violation develops into a separation from the source of our existence. The act can cause the alienation. Alienation can cause the act.

"Sin," he points out:

is something more than climbing up on a chair and stealing a cookie . . . Sin is not gambling, drinking, lying, stealing, fornicating. These are symptoms of sin: like a boil which is the symptom of an infection in the blood stream. Sin is leaving Home. I am speaking of our family home as a symbol of a greater Home. Sin is leaving Home without caring, cutting yourself off from the very source of existence. Sin is trying to live as though nobody cared about you, so you don't have to care about anybody else. It manifests itself, of course, in all sorts of ways; in pride that can be as stiff as steel; in lust as hot as molten lava; in indifference that can be as cool as a cucumber; and in withdrawal into the safe, warm chrysalis of your own comfort.⁵⁸

Christianity calls this "original sin". It is original because it is as old as man. It is original because there is a tendency in every human being to misuse his freedom. It is harder sometimes to see it in other people than

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Theodore Parker Ferris, "How Deep Our Sin Goes" (transcribed sermon, March 6, 1960.)

it is in ourselves. It is not an acquired tendency it is an inherited one. We are affected by what other people do.

"When a child is born," Ferris maintains: "he comes not only trailing clouds of glory, he comes in some way smeared with the dirt that has accumulated in the course of human events."⁵⁹ This causes us to look for our redemption.

Soteriology

Man has a way of getting into trouble, but he also has an ingenious way of getting out of it. There are times, however, when he cannot get himself out: he has to be bailed out by someone else; out of jail; out of the dumps; out of a hopeless situation. One of the words the New Testament uses to describe this experience is redeem. Literally, it means to buy back.

Redemption. Today, it means different things to different people. For some it doesn't mean anything. For some it means being saved from the consequences of their sins. Consequences usually mean punishment; now or later but it is hell. The more sensitive the person, the more acute the suffering. For others it means being drawn out of a life that makes no sense into an existence that is full of significance.

People are essentially no different now than they

⁵⁹Ibid.

were in the New Testament, but their world is different; their thinking is different; their language is different; the sin is the same but the sinner looks at it differently.

Ferris reminds us:

We cannot simply repeat New Testament phrases like "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us": or "God so loved the world". It isn't that they aren't true; they don't ring any bells.

Thousands of people are in danger and they know it. They want to be listened to; not censured, not condemned, but understood.⁶⁰

The fundamentalist approach leaves him unimpressed:

There is a certain brand of Christianity which has no doubt produced many a saint, but which many of us do not embrace with any warmth of welcome. It is that particular brand by which a person insists on telling everybody else what Jesus personally means to him; when Jesus came into his life; the hour and the day of conversion, instantaneous and complete. And then the assumption is made that unless one has had that kind of conversion experience you are not really converted. It begins with a witness. It ends with an assumption: I'm O.K. you're not O.K.⁶¹

Needless to say, Ferris was not one of them.

Addressing the Cathedral School of St. Paul's, he admitted:

I never went through the experience of being saved by Christ. As a matter of fact as a young boy and later as a young man, I never felt that I was lost. Being damned to eternal punishment, burning in the everlasting fires of hell, never even occurred to me as a possibility. This experience which has been so much a part of the lives of great Christians, for one reason or another, for better or for worse, was totally absent in my life.⁶²

⁶⁰Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951.) p. 88.

⁶¹Theodore Parker Ferris, "This Matter of Conversion" (transcribed sermon, March 20, 1950.)

⁶²Theodore Parker Ferris, Lectures to the Cathedral School of Saint Paul's, unpublished notes, 1970.

Instead, Ferris was one of those whom William James, in his great religious and psychological work, The Varieties of Religious Experience, described as the once-born. The changes in his life were more like a long slow process of growth and development. He could not point to any one major crisis in his life. Rather, his life consisted of many minor crises, little decisions, visions that may not have swept the sky, but nevertheless gave light on his way.

Both the twice-born and the once-born he felt, were subject to spiritual dangers. The twice-born were disposed all the time to the danger of self-righteousness. The once-born were in danger of carelessness, complacency, self-indulgence, of taking for granted the blessings that had been given them and not telling people about it.

What concerned him even more was another group which he identified as the "still born." "They go through all the movements of Christianity," he said:

they go to church indefatigably, they give to the church, they do church work, and yet in things sometimes important and sometimes unimportant they give themselves totally away, they show themselves to be people who have not the slightest idea what it is all about.⁶³

These people especially need a Redeemer.

The Redeemer. On one occasion when Ferris was speaking to a group of young people, one of them asked him, "How does

⁶³Theodore Parker Ferris, "The Saviour and the Sinner" (transcribed sermon, March 26, 1966.)

Jesus save you?" At first he was embarrassed by the question and was not sure how to answer it. He thought about it and put this down:

I can honestly say that he saves me here and now, not from punishment in the future, and not from the consequences of my sins and mistakes. I have to cope with those myself. He saves me here and now from being so wrapped up in myself that I miss the opportunities around me, the possibilities within me, and the glory overhead.⁶⁴

He continued, "He does this in four ways which I can see and describe:"

1. He gives me something to do that takes me out of myself.
2. He shows me my weak spots.
3. He accepts me as I am.
4. He saves me by occasionally getting inside of me, something the way electricity gets inside a bulb, and does things that I could not possibly do myself.⁶⁵

In this context, Ferris was not referring to a Jesus who lived two thousand years ago, or a far off distant goal. He was speaking about a Power, a Spirit, an Energy, a Vitality, a New Creation that takes hold of one, incorporates one into itself, and somehow in spite of all one's problems, anxieties, tensions and weaknesses, makes one into a new person.

Ferris described how this Power took hold of Paul. In a sermon entitled "The New Creation", he said that it made Paul a new man. It did not make him a more moral one,

⁶⁴Ibid. ⁶⁵Ibid.

as he was already so moral that it was hard both for himself and society to bear. But it did make him a more creative one. It took away his hostility and turned it into empathy. It made him a happy, useful person. It made him a reconciler, and wherever he went he did the things that Jesus had been doing.

"This New Creation", preached Ferris, in true evangelical style, "can be in you." Then asking the question for the congregation, he proceeded, "You say how in the world can I do it?" . . . "Here are three things" he responded, as he pressed for a decision:

First, say now that you want it.
 Second, keep close to other people who want it.
 And third, make your supreme aim in life
 no matter what you happen to do by way of a career,
 the communication of the New Creation
 in other people.⁶⁶

Besides being biblical, the term The New Creation was part of the major emphasis of Paul Tillich's theology. There is no question, but that Tillich's work profoundly influenced Ferris. In the same sermon we have just quoted, he acknowledged his debt, and then concluded by quoting a paragraph from Tillich, referring to it as one of the most moving passages he knew. Here it is:

When we meet Fascist and idealists, we should say to them: don't think we want to convert you. We only want to communicate to you an experience we have had that here and there in the world, and now and then in ourselves, is a New Creation, usually hidden, but

⁶⁶Theodore Parker Ferris, "The New Creation",
 (transcribed sermon, October 18, 1959.)

sometimes manifest, and certainly manifest in Jesus who is called the Christ.⁶⁷

THERAPEUTIC

Therapeuein is a good New Testament word meaning to serve or do service, to cure or restore to health. Ferris saw the therapeutic sermon as an extension of the healing ministry of Jesus. Like Fosdick, he was convinced of the validity of "life-situational preaching". He had, however, some reservations about the concept of "pastoral counselling en masse". He was suspicious of the attempt to deal en masse with any illness, either mental or physical. He was aware with David Roberts, that the sickness of every individual is different, and that salvation or wholeness must be offered in a context which affirms the varieties of human temperament and character.

He believed that the age in which he lived was an age of anxiety: "It is perhaps true," he wrote in

Go Tell the People:

that ninety-nine percent of the ailments of people today spring originally from a deep, pervading mood of anxiety. It has many close companions which turn out to be nothing more than the same disease in another dress - insecurity, loneliness, extreme aggressiveness, etc. One thing the preacher can do is to help show the people the nature of the disease.⁶⁸

⁶⁷Paul Tillich, The New Being (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 18.

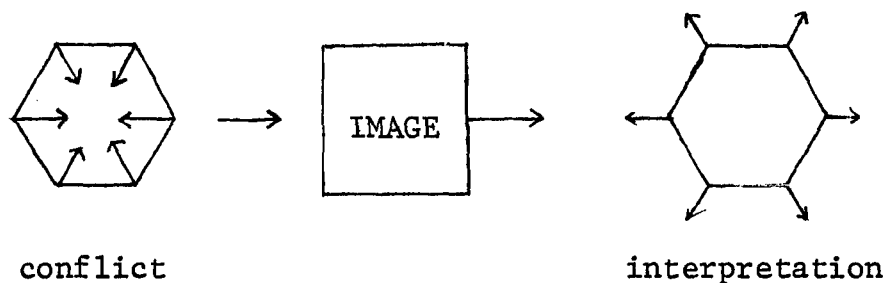
⁶⁸Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 49.

Ferris did this by helping the listener to grapple with the anxiety that was plaguing him, and by aiding in the discovery and identity of its specific manifestation. The function of the sermon was to unleash the powers available, so as to put an end to the conflict, enabling the listener to achieve a sense of wholeness and inner harmony. The method employed was one which led from an insight into the person's predicament, to the question of Christ, and from the question of Christ, to the divine answer which could be either reject or accepted.

The model for this kind of preaching had its roots in Freudian psychology. It is in fact the therapeutic approach that was used by Freud, in his best known cases of "Little Hans" and "The Wolf Man".

The Freudian Model

If we were to diagram the process, it would look something like this:



The general 'drift' of the theory is that the therapist should never tell the patient 'point blank' what his trouble is, but should allow the patient to uncover it for

himself. The therapist's function is to provide suitable criteria for the patient, making it possible for an "image" to emerge. This image acts as a revelation of the conflict, and provides the necessary dynamic so that the patient is enabled to make his own interpretation and response.

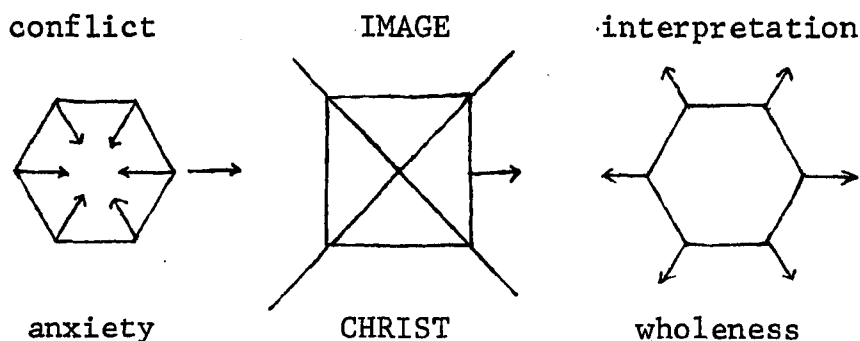
That Ferris was aware of this model is evident from his Lectures on Preaching. He told his students that many great preachers suffered from psychological disorders. He named Donald Baillie and Harry Emerson Fosdick, but said nothing directly about himself. He did say that every one had a weakness. Not every one is conscious of the source of it or the cause of it, and no one should be in the least embarrassed to seek professional help in order to identify it. "The value of the psychiatrist," he said, "is to provide assistance in discovering for yourself what the difficulty is. When you know what it is, let Christ take hold of it, and your weakness will be turned to strength."⁶⁹

Ferris' Model

Obviously, Ferris was not prepared to follow Freud's model to the length of natural humanness, but he was convinced of the truth of it. He did not believe that a person could reach a sense of wholeness "all by himself". He believed that the power which frees a person from anxiety

⁶⁹Theodore Parker Ferris, Lectures on Preaching, unpublished notes.

is divine as well as human. Consequently he baptized the model and came up with something like this:



What we have here is Ferris' model for salvation. If he were to interpret it as he saw it we would see the conflict as some manifestation of anxiety. It would be representative of the weaknesses inherited by heredity, the neuroses acquired from one's environment, and the social evils in the world over which one has no control. For each person, the anxiety is unique. The only similarity is that each is symptomatic of man's estrangement from the ground of his existence, namely God.

The function of the preacher is not to condemn, but to make possible a relationship of trust, in which the person can be offered the suggestion of the "perfect man" as the possible redemptive image which can make him whole. Brought face to face with a revelation of his anxiety, he can apply the "image" to his situation and arrive at the interpretation relevant to his need.

In his book Go Tell the People, he confirms the use

of this model:

One thing the preacher can do . . . is to set before the people a picture of the perfect man, Jesus, who went about his way in quietness and confidence, with no trace of anxiety or disquietude of mind or spirit. He can make certain recommendations to them, ways and means by which they may increasingly overcome this spiritual illness of theirs. And finally, he may make in their presence, affirmations of the truth, which will exercise in them the power of suggestion, as those affirmations sink into the deep levels of their subconscious mind. In one way this kind of suggestion may be more powerful when it is done with a large group of people, than when it is done with individuals.⁷⁰

One of his sermons almost completely objectifies this idea. We are thinking of his sermon on the theme, "Alone, Yet Not Lonely". He begins by pointing out the fact that the world is full of people who are lonely yet who are almost never alone. On the other hand is Jesus, constantly alone, deliberately seeking solitude, yet never lonely. "You shall leave me alone," he said, "yet I am not alone because the Father is with me."

Ferris pursues the theme with all its various implications. He makes the suggestion that we will never overcome our loneliness until we have been alone more. Some suggestions are made as to how one's solitude can bring one closer to God. Then he concludes with some powerful affirmations which show the effectiveness of this kind of preaching:

You are alone in the universe, yet never lonely.

⁷⁰Theodore Parker Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 49.

The stars shine down on you. The sun is bright for you. The good earth holds you up. The world of men and women and their need calls you. God made you. God knows you. God loves you. God keeps you. God is with you forever. We are alone yet not lonely.⁷¹

SUMMARY

This brings us to the central thrust of Ferris' message. When we examine it we cannot say that it is God-centered or man-centered. Its true distinction is that it is bi-polar, or gospel-centered. Its concern is with the meeting between God and man, and with the tensions which rise within the encounter calling for human response to God's revelation. It leads primarily not to knowledge about the self, but to self-knowledge; not to knowledge about God, but to knowledge of God. If we were to put it in biblical terms we would say that it leads primarily not to gnosis but to epignosis, it is the knowledge derived from man in his need, responding to God's self-disclosure in Christ.

Without a doubt, Ferris was a Christ-preacher of unique persuasiveness. He brought the warmth and wonder of the manhood of Jesus and his profundity as the inexhaustible Christ. And he did it with such penetration of thought, and such luminous simplicity, that the most learned could be grateful and the humblest understand.

He breathed some welcomed fresh air of life when so much was being said despairingly about death: the death of God, and the death of the Church. His preaching was constructive. He did not seek to tear down and destroy

the faith and doctrine of the Church, but sought to build, explain and expound.

He was possessed with a sanctified imagination. His spirit was liberal, open and devout. He had the ability to probe deep and lay bare the sins of individuals, and the rare skill to translate doctrine into dedication. His preaching had the immediacy of contemporary thought, and the perception and depth of the biblical background. To him, every sermon was a sacrament.

His ministry, like all our ministries was imperfect. He certainly lacked the prophetic courage of the nineteenth century preacher and reformer, Theodore Parker. He was no Amos. I doubt if any prophet ever sat, as he did, as a trustee of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Sadly, he often preferred the melody of viols and harps, away from the cataracts of controversy and the demands of social justice. Unfortunately, it was the secular press rather than the sacred Word which pricked the preacher's conscience. It was the secular society, not the saints that showed the way. Perhaps it is significant, that both he and Phillips Brooks called themselves priests, not prophets.

In the final analysis, I suppose, there is only one perfect ministry in which the function of prophet and priest are inseparably combined, and that is the ministry of Christ. Ferris never claimed to come anywhere near it. He was too much aware of his own faults and failings.

In spite of his imperfection, he sent out week after week, year after year, a lively, healing and enabling word to thousands of people from all walks of life. Though a spell-binder, it was obvious that his concern was for more than the display of his own talents. He belonged to something far greater than himself.

Theodore Parker Ferris, in spite of the piety that begrimed him, was a window to a splendor beyond our devising. He preached in light. His tongue was a flame!

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